

**Spelling as Inquiry:  
One Teacher's Journey**

**By**

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**A Thesis**

**Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of**

**Master of Education**

**Faculty of Education  
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba**

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**Tannis A. Nishibata-Chan**

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University  
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree  
of**

**MASTER OF EDUCATION**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is about the role of inquiry for understanding how children learn about spelling and the social context which supports children's development as spellers. It is also an inquiry into my own teaching - exploring how my beliefs about language and literacy learning impact how I build and enact a spelling curriculum with the children.

Using the methodology of Teacher Action Research, I observed children (taking notes and recording conversations as they are involved with spelling); examined the children's questions and wonderings as they wrote; and reflected on narrative accounts that characterize the children's efforts to learn about spelling within the classroom community during a period of one school year.

The writing of this work has expanded how I view spelling as a collaborative inquiry and I now recognize that it is indeed possible to create a powerful, effective curriculum in which spelling grows out of the children's own explorations as they read and write. The children's investigations, rather than a fixed sequence of spelling skills and strategies, became the central element in spelling instruction. I kept a paper trail of how curricular decisions were made. I discovered the children and I needed to articulate our thinking and make it visible to others. Sharing our expertise and building communal relationships with one another created for the children an interest in language and expanded our resource base. This inquiry-driven environment supported problem solving, higher-level thinking possibilities and mindful decision-making about spelling, all within a social framework.

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## Acknowledgements

It has taken me seven years to complete my coursework and a thesis that honours the role of inquiry in my professional and personal life. I am finally done. I cannot believe that this stack of papers in front of me fills the requirements of the university but also reflects an important and necessary journey that I have taken as a learner. I feel so fortunate to be surrounded by people who genuinely care about the work that I do and who have listened to my stories, both inside and outside of the classroom.

To my husband Ron, for valuing my passion for teaching, for always being there when I needed a break and for encouraging me to keep writing when the going got tough. Your patience, love and support has sustained me throughout this journey.

To my precious son, Cameron who has blessed us with his presence this year. As I wrote about inquiry, we were living it, wondering and wandering through parenthood. This thesis has largely been written during his first year of life. I am thankful for his long stretches of sleep, for the smile that would eagerly greet me when he woke up and for inspiring me to close one chapter of my life and begin another. My life has been greatly enriched.

I would also like to thank my mom and dad, Ken and Nancy Nishibata, for their unconditional support, for those dinners that helped save time for writing and for believing in my decisions. They have given me a childhood of meaningful experiences for which I am forever grateful.

To an insightful teacher and a treasured friend, Claire Sutton. Thank you for always being just a phone call or email away and for dropping whatever you were doing to listen to my ramblings and answer my questions about my thesis. I am grateful for our discussions over taco salad and for your insights about my writing and teaching.

I am deeply indebted to my thesis committee of Professor Joan Irvine, Dr. Judith Newman and Dr. Wayne Serebrin. It is an honour and a privilege to work with such brilliant teachers who live their beliefs with conviction and whose teachings inspire me to work even harder to live my beliefs in the classroom. All three members of my committee have opened my world to the language of collaborative inquiry. I am grateful for Joan's ability to push my thinking, ask good (but hard) questions and bring clarity to the overall structure and organization of my thesis. Her wisdom has made a difference in my life, both professionally and personally. Judith's nudging and encouragement to "just get writing" has been a tremendous help. I am thankful for her procedural suggestions and for introducing me to "critical incidents" in my teaching - these stories have helped me to attend to what were important issues in my professional life. I have to attribute my pursuit of a Master's thesis to Wayne, for I could not have possibly passed by the opportunity to study with him again. I am especially grateful for his depth of knowledge and expertise about young children's learning, for his many invitations to engage in professional conversations and for always being available to pull resources, offer support or provide constructive feedback to meet my needs as a student, even in the busiest of times. He is a true mentor, a valued colleague and a wonderful friend.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank the families of Lord Wolseley School for sharing their children with me and allowing me to learn with and from them as we pursued this spelling inquiry together. Their words and stories bring life to the pages of this thesis.



## Foreword

Everyone has a viewpoint about spelling and an idea of what it should look like in an early years classroom. Historically, spelling has been of concern to parents, and often the public wonders if spelling is even being taught in the schools. Opinions about spelling abound, and it is difficult for people to separate their own childhood experiences from the spelling instruction that is supported by research and practice today. There are numerous ill-informed stories in the media about isolated skills instruction versus whole language teaching, drill and memorization versus child-centered, experiential learning. Not only are these terms thrown around carelessly, but they are misunderstood, raising major concerns and instilling fear in parents that spelling is not valued or important to the education of young children.

In spite of these concerns, there is convincing evidence indicating that children spell as well as they did a decade ago and much better than they did at the end of the last century (Wilde, 1992). If this is true, why does the teaching and learning of spelling cause so much anxiety today? A traditional approach, where everyone is likely to study similar spelling words and practice for a test at the end of a week, may appear to look neat, tidy and controlled. However, we need to ask how well children really learn to spell using this approach and what the limitations of using this approach are on children's writing. Does this approach encourage children to become writers? Does it help children connect their literary lives to spelling? Is there carry over into their writing? A spelling curriculum focusing on word lists would not inform the various processes, strategies and patterns that whole language teachers consider when thinking about the role of spelling in writing.

Teachers who adopt a whole language philosophy try to make connections between spelling and other areas of the language arts, namely, reading and writing. The controversial term, "invented spelling" refers to the functional, constructive way in which children approximate the conventional spelling of words, as they draw upon their knowledge of language and print to express their thoughts and ideas on paper. Children risk constructing a spelling for a word they want to write where they know that their approximation will be valued. Invented spelling empowers children to find their voice and to understand the purpose of writing. They are not limited to the words they know how to spell and therefore can use powerful and interesting language in their writing. Careful observation of children's use of invented spelling provides teachers with information about what children understand. These assessments can subsequently be used to plan further instruction. In this way, spelling instruction is well thought through, specific to the children's needs and builds upon their current understanding of language. Yet, parents and the general public tend to see only the errors and are disconcerted when they observe children's inaccurate attempts at writing. They are concerned that standard spelling is not expected and they fail to appreciate that the children's spelling attempts enable their teachers to gain insight into what the child knows and to build upon this knowledge. Instead of valuing the child's growing control over convention, they tend to notice only what the child does not yet control (Laminack & Wood, 1996).

Because spelling is such an emotionally-charged issue, spelling instruction has become highly politicized and sometimes it has even become a primary indicator of the success or failure of our schools. Sandra Wilde (1996) states that, "in a way, the debate about spelling is part of a larger controversy about who controls education, what

children's and teachers' lives in classrooms should be like, and what literacy is" (p. 39).

In many places the government's response to this controversy has been to administer standards tests to measure how well our children are performing in relation to grade-level expectations. These test scores make it possible to compare - countries, provinces, school divisions, schools and classrooms - as a reflection of the quality of schooling that children are receiving. It follows that if some children are not measuring up to children in other jurisdictions, then standards can be raised to resolve this problem.

But are these test results valid indicators of the quality of children's education? Alfie Kohn (1999) writes about the misunderstanding and implicit assumption that all children need the same kind and amount of instruction to reach a certain goal. He argues that such a position fails to appreciate that children's learning develops in different ways and at different rates. From a teacher's perspective, the question is do such tests provide information about the children in my classroom so that I can better support their learning?

As the government pushes for common standards, this creates pressure on school divisions. In response to this pressure, school divisions direct their teachers toward programs that view spelling as a linear, step-by-step process, with lesson plans that follow a narrow sequence pattern. Teachers are advised to use these programs' workbooks or suggested centers, freeing the teacher to attend to other writing issues. When children struggle or do not meet the expectations that these programs promise, it becomes easier to shift the blame to the child.

Is there a simple solution or a pre-packaged program that can create a stronger speller or fix a struggling writer? Sometimes teachers who challenge these approaches, pose questions or doubt the administrative decision making are not looked upon

favourably. Rather than viewing this kind of educational program as an opportunity for professionals to converse or dialogue, instead, teachers feel they have been given a directive for which they have had little or no input.

It might be easier for a teacher to "just go with the flow", rather than challenging these decisions. A teacher wonders if her deeply held beliefs about how children learn will be honored and whose responsibility it is to plan for spelling instruction in her classroom? She asks whether the current climate strips her of her professional right to decide how she should teach.

This study is situated within this wider, political context and sets the backdrop within which I find myself as a teacher, who is attempting to understand and resolve the tensions that I am feeling as an educator around spelling.

## **Introduction**

## On Understanding My Discomfort

*"But... she doesn't teach spelling... or at least not the way we used to learn it. We love the writing the kids do, the projects they are engaged in, the way they use art to express themselves, and the poetry! It is a great classroom with lots of energy and new ideas but shouldn't my child be spelling all of her words correctly?" That phrase - it continues to ring in my ears, haunting me. An overheard conversation that I am not supposed to hear. In my mind, I want to articulate every spelling endeavor that we engage in over the course of a day. I want to say that it looks different, but it is there. We are attending to it. It matters, but it is not the most important thing in our writerly lives. Should it be? Why am I doubting myself? How did "spelling" become so personal? What am I going to do about it? (TNC Journal, 11/02/1998)*

Many questions and wonderings begin to percolate in my mind, as I puzzle over a single comment that slowly begins to eat away at me. I strive to live my beliefs in the classroom and I am not sure whether to take a defensive or a reflective stance in response to this comment. Spelling is not a new tension in my professional career. Every year I browse professional books and articles, trying to re-invent ways that spelling could be more innovative and progressive in my teaching. I am not in search of a recipe, but there does seem to be a gap in the literature on spelling. While I believe the theoretical understandings of language development are critical as a knowledge base for teachers, it is hard to visualize what spelling instruction might look like with children in classroom settings, without real examples of this in the literature. At the other end of the spectrum, I find it of little use to sift through scope and sequence guides, reading nifty tips that simplify spelling through trite activities. Finding a way to approach spelling that is consistent with my beliefs and that meets the children's needs is what compells me to explore this topic.

Spelling is a topic that is often avoided by teachers, and yet it is the one area that I have a genuine desire to pursue. I would like to think spelling is just a part of my entire writing program, though in the larger society its significance is so magnified that it has become a highly visible discipline itself - one that is accuracy-based and subject to constant measurement. Taking on spelling as a topic is a true inquiry for me - it is based on genuine questions and something that is problematic for me in my teaching. Exploring spelling means taking a risk, letting go of what I am currently doing and operating outside of my comfort zone.

In addition to directives from government and the school division, I am immersed in a larger teaching community and regularly listen to colleagues and consultants airing their thoughts and concerns about spelling. It is evident that there is a wide range of beliefs about spelling instruction among them, reflecting a myriad of opinions about practices that will best help children to become competent spellers. Teachers are not all in agreement about the best way to teach spelling. As mentioned above, in many classrooms spelling appears to be a subject that stands outside of the writing process. There are mandatory lists of grade level spelling words and spelling patterns to be covered within a specific time. Teaching in response to children's constructed spelling is considered to be too difficult, and because teachers have a limited knowledge base from which to work, they often make decisions in the classroom that are not theoretically grounded. Contradictions exist, for example, between what teachers believe about young children's language development and their actual teaching practice. If, as Sandra Wilde (1996) states, that "spelling curriculum and instruction need to reflect the knowledge base of the teacher, the developmental levels and needs of the students, and the desires of the

community," I feel the need to broaden my own knowledge base and to determine how this knowledge base might translate into practice with the children in my classroom.

This is my third year as a multi-age teacher. In a multi-age grouping, three grade levels are intentionally placed together to form a community of learners. Children of different ages, experiences and abilities learn together with an emphasis on the children's needs and interests. Children are encouraged to be inquisitive, to take risks and to engage in learning that involves real life experiences. Diversity is valued and children are monitored in terms of their individual progress. As a teacher, this philosophical stance is consistent with and supports what I believe about young children as learners. It is a developmentally sound way to teach. It focuses on children as they grow and allows me to build a rapport with them over a three year period. There is a sense of continuity. In this regard it can also be extremely challenging, especially with those learners who are struggling in certain areas, forcing me to stretch as their teacher, seeking out all possibilities and resources that I am able to find. I understand the dynamic nature of development and know that children do not always follow a linear path or sequence. I am sensitive to differences and value diversity in learners. Yet, it is hard to face the reality that, at the end of our three years together in multi-age, there are still some children who cannot spell commonly used words conventionally. Are my expectations too high? Are they unrealistic? Are these pressures a result of the increasing emphasis on standards testing and outcome-based assessment procedures that the government is asking all Grade 3 teachers to implement? A supportive parent, who is also a teacher and who happens to be teaching Grade 3, is feeling this crunch with her own son. I record a note from her in my journal:



*"Tannis, can you see any progress in Grady's writing/spelling at all? From what I can see, I know he's not where he should be and that does have me worried! Do you think he would benefit more with a 'word family/phonetic approach' although... I notice that when he spells words that I know he has learned, he continues to almost overemphasize the letter sounds as he spells the word out, instead of just saying, 'Oh, I know how to spell this.' His learning strategies and retaining what he has learned has me baffled... I guess what some of my concerns boil down to is the ELA exam! I'm afraid he's going to fall to pieces unless a great miracle happens between now and then! Do you have any of these concerns, or is it just the "mom" in me, "trying to be the teacher too" who is over-reacting about her child?? Suggestions? Is there extra help that he can get at school?" (TNC Journal, 01/12/1999)*

The panic and worry that these tests create concerns me, especially in light of my understanding that learning to spell is developmental (Gentry, 1987) and that children construct their knowledge of the spelling system with experience. Are we doing what we feel supports and nurtures children or are we allowing the government to pressure us to implement assessment procedures that are inconsistent with what we know are in the best interests of young children? Are we allowing kids to crumble? The pressure is mounting for children to perform and for their teachers to focus on product rather than process. Being a teacher who values spelling within the writing process, I have difficulty adopting a view that places emphasis and time on only the end result, rather than on what children are doing and learning as they write.

I do not consider myself a naive person. I know there will always be constraints within a system. The significant stakeholders - parents, administrators, school divisions, and society, as a whole - need to better understand what we are doing with spelling and need to be shown how we are teaching spelling in the classroom. Rather than the endless talk about being accountable to these concerned stakeholders, I prefer to think of my own professional responsibility in learning more about spelling and looking closely at my

practice, using the children as my "curricular informants" (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984). In fact, this is where my journey begins, with an examination of my current beliefs about learning and how this impacts the spelling instruction that I engage in with the children in my classroom.

## **The Role of Inquiry In Learning**

"Indeed, the kind of teacher that we are reflects the kind of life that we lead. The same may be said of our students" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 27).

I will always maintain that the personal and professional spheres of my life are interconnected - I simply cannot separate them. My classroom reflects who I am. Who I am as a learner is no different from who I am as a teacher. While my understandings of inquiry are evolving, they are embedded in the notion of inquiry as a stance. Inquiry is central to the way in which I view my life. I believe in "the action of asking" (Lindfors, 1999:ix) as a way of coming to know something. When I explore my questions, new understandings surface and then I delve deeper, to investigate significant issues that are currently important to me. Being a reflective practitioner has me thinking about the why's and how's of what I do. While engaging in reflection, I unpack my own thinking, but I also find ways to broaden my knowledge, support my learning and negotiate how something may be or may not be consistent with my life view, experiences and current philosophical framework about life and about teaching. Inquiry is cyclical in nature for me, with the asking of initial questions, pursuing these questions with more depth and developing new questions which are based on my newly created understandings.

As a teacher who engages in inquiry with young children, curriculum development is a social process - with learners and the teacher collaborating together to make decisions based on the experience and needs of a specific community of learners (Short & Burke, 1991). There is an understanding that we learn with and from one another, and in doing so we build a community. In an inquiry cycle, the members of a

learning community make personal connections and observations, they share their thinking and actions in process, they shift perspectives, they attend to surprises, they present findings, they reflect on their learning, and they plan new actions based on their more sophisticated and informed understandings (Berghoff, Egawa, Harste, & Hunan, 2000).

In an inquiry, the background experiences that children bring to school are celebrated and built upon, as children pose questions they truly wonder about. Inquiry encourages curiosity in children and because their questions are important to them, the learning that evolves is meaningful, relevant and authentic to their lives. These questions have a spiralling effect and lead to the asking of more questions, ones that reflect a higher level of thinking. Inquiry is "not just a set of activities; it is putting into action a system of beliefs that highlights both action and reflection in learning and teaching" (Short & Burke, 1991). Coming to understand something with breadth, depth and an appreciation is central to determining what is worth doing.

An inquiry has elements of choice, decision making and reflection which further inform and define the curriculum that develops within the classroom learning environment. These processes are ongoing and lead to deeper understandings, new questions and empower learners in their quest for knowledge. Inquiry is open ended, allowing children to sort through information and to be problem posers and problem solvers (Freire, 1985). Children are a critical part of the evolution within a study, as I listen carefully to their questions and conversations. One of the teacher's roles is to set the frameworks for an inquiry. Inquiry is intentional and highly organized even though there is room for thinking about diverse ways to explore a topic and where learners'

questions drive the process (Short, Burke, Harste, 1996). Teachers organize and plan around big ideas, outlining limitless potentials and possibilities within a study; they practice effective "kidwatching" (Y. Goodman, 1978) and use their observations to help inform what they plan; and, they demonstrate flexibility, seeing opportunities before they happen and capitalizing upon the directions that children show interest in pursuing. My voice and input as a teacher is equally as important as the children's, as I, too, am a member of that community. There is a sense of negotiation and a fine balance is struck between what the children bring to the experience and my own professional understandings of teaching, learning and young children's development.

Finally, we draw upon curriculum disciplines when exploring an inquiry with young children, bringing multiple perspectives to a topic specific to an area of study. We may view the world from an entymologist's perspective in a study of bees or we may take on the perspective of a marine biologist in a study of whales. The reason for taking on these perspectives is that they allow us to explore a topic using each discipline's questions, processes and tools for learning; which inform the inquiry in unique and specific ways. Children are invited to represent their knowledge in multiple ways, such as through art, drama or music.

My own understandings and beliefs about inquiry are solid and I recognize that everything I believe about learning lends itself to the notion of collaborative inquiry. This foundation lays the groundwork for everything that I do. However, Bean and Bouffler (1997) challenge me to look critically at my current language teaching practices in relation to collaborative inquiry, when they declare that, "how you go about teaching spelling and proofreading very much depends not only on your understanding of spelling

but also on what you believe about the way children learn" (p. 19). My beliefs are largely consistent, but I am faced with dissonance when I consider how my current spelling teaching practices fit within my theory of language learning and collaborative inquiry. Examining my classroom practice through this lens, gives me the opportunity to investigate how my interactions are or are not consistent with my beliefs.

## **Language Learning and Collaborative Inquiry: Separate Entities**

Language and literacy permeates everything we do; children listen, speak, read, write, view and represent within the context of our topic of study. My current point of view is that spelling has a place within the context of authentic writing. I believe it is a "tool that writers use to make their thoughts more understandable to an audience, not as an end to itself" (Wilde, 1992, p.9). Our learner-centered environment values reading and writing, as well as gives children purposeful opportunities for learning about spelling. The way my classroom environment is structured reveals a lot of what I believe about language learning. I am committed to giving children big blocks of time to pursue their writing in depth. Writing invitations are extended that are relevant to the thematic study we are currently engaged in, so that the children's writing can be set within a context, as they explore different genre forms. I believe in inviting children to engage in diverse writing topics, ones that validate their thoughts, their noticings and their very existence (Calkins, 1991). Children are given choice and ownership to pursue writing and drawing, using both as tools to express themselves and to communicate with others. It is important for me to know the children in my classroom as individuals so that I can further their learning in appropriate ways during writing conferences. I am also convinced that learning is a social endeavor, reflective of the small and large group interactions around the room. I regularly carry a clipboard around to observe different group dynamics, in addition to taking note of each child's writing development.

Because I believe that spelling is a part of the reading-writing-composing process, I look for teaching opportunities that address the children's various needs, developmental levels and interests in language learning. We may do this through the close examination

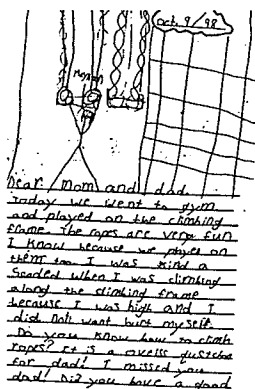
of a poem we are reciting, while enjoying the playfulness of language in a book during a read aloud or through mini-lessons that help children discover and explore common spelling patterns and rules in the English language. I encourage young children to write words the way they think they should be spelled, using functional spellings. This allows the children to be writers from the first day of school. The children use resources around the room, such as signs, books, charts, poetry and agendas, in addition to personal and classroom dictionaries. We take time to highlight children's work on the overhead projector, invite their classmates' response, and I offer constructive feedback regarding notable spelling strategies or patterns I have observed in their writing. I occasionally write a daily edit that we work through together, wherein we explore common language errors the children make, and we use this activity as a springboard for further conversation. Children are also encouraged to proofread and edit any writing that goes on to a final draft or publication.

I am relatively comfortable with the way I approach spelling within the writing process, however I feel a sense of dissatisfaction when I think about how my current spelling instructional practices fit with my beliefs about collaborative inquiry. I feel myself wanting to find a balance between encouraging children to use interesting words and self-chosen writing topics that generate much excitement and needing to stress the importance of caring about conventions using conventional spelling when writing for an audience beyond themselves. There is a constant push and pull within me. The following "critical incidents" (Newman, 1991) relate "moments which have forced me to stand back and examine my beliefs and my teaching critically" (p.246) as I try to deal with this tension.



One writing ritual that tries to attend to this balance is our weekly letter to families, entitled T.W.A.S. T.W.A.S. is an acronym for This Week At School. Each Friday the children share with their families some interesting anecdotes about their learning or significant events - from their perspective - for that week. This purposeful endeavor gives the children an authentic reason to write, keeping conventions in mind. This weekly record also provides documentation of their writing development over the year. Time is set aside during this engagement for me to individually conference with children about their writing. Often I will stop to note possible mini-lessons that seem necessary for us to deal with as a whole class. While this takes a significant amount of time each Friday morning, it seems well worth the effort. It is the one time of the week I have the chance to preview each individual child's work with them and to use my observations of their collective work to plan mini-lessons for the following week.

Before the children begin to write we have a conversation about something I have observed that they, as a group, have done well the week prior in their T.W.A.S. On this particular day, I comment on the children's use of conversation to make their writing more interactive for their reader, and how they have expanded upon an idea and stretched it, adding detail to their writing.



time in Russell? Do you like your card? Happy birthday DS

!! P.S. is there any good stories in Russell?

Figure 1. Maynard's T.W.A.S. entry

As we look at Maynard's piece of writing on the overhead, I begin to share my observations with the children.

*"I notice that people are starting to think hard about what they want to say and are being selective about what they are writing instead of writing a new idea for each sentence or listing all the things that we've done this week. Here are a few examples (selected children read their pieces aloud). In Maynard's piece, I like how it sounds like she is talking to her Mom and Dad, as if they were right here. When she reads her T.W.A.S. to them, they'll have to respond back to her, answering her questions." (TNC Journal, 10/09/1998)*

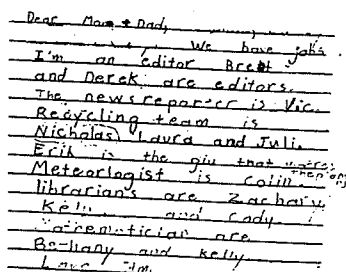
I am pleased to see the children attending to rich content, noting that their writing holds meaning for them and that T.W.A.S. is a means through which they communicate weekly with their family about school.

We also set a goal or a challenge to work at before they start writing for that day.

I ask the children to consider the following, before coming to edit with me:

*"Something I'd like you to think about this week when you're writing is your spelling. When you're proofreading, I want you to try to choose words that don't look quite right to you and circle them, so that we can "Have A Go" when we conference together. I also want you to try to use any other strategies or resources around the room to help you with your spelling." (TNC Journal, 10/09/98)*

I really want them to pay more attention to the conventions in their writing, without changing the content. I want to help them lift the quality of their writing. What some children produce is not what I anticipate.



Dear Mom & Dad,  
We have jobs.  
I'm an editor. Brent  
and Derek are editors.  
The new reporter is Vic.  
Recycling team is  
Nicholas, Laura and Juli.  
Erin is the guy that waters  
Meteorologist is Colin.  
Librarians are Zachary,  
Kelli and Cody.  
Mathematicians are  
Bethany and Kelly.  
Love, Amy

Dear Mom and Dad, We have jobs. I'm an editor, Brent and Derek are editors. The new reporter is Vic. Recycling team is Nicholas, Laura and Juli. Erin is the guy that waters the plants. Meteorologist is Colin. Librarians are Zachary, Kellie and Cody. Mathematicians are Bethany and Kelly. Love, Amy

Figure 2. Amy's T.W.A.S. entry

What have I done? What do the children think I have asked for? The writing is pretty stagnant and not very interesting. It is safe and secure as most of these words are clearly written around the classroom. I am filled with disappointment. Am I sending mixed messages? Am I undoing what we have worked so hard to build? Is there a happy medium? My emphasis began with the writing itself - the richness of language, the noticing of details, the emotions associated with an event - all of which I hoped would allow children to live writerly lives (Calkins, 1991). This is an important goal of mine as a teacher of writing, yet I walk a fine line. I feel it is also my responsibility to suggest possibilities for refining their writing, both the content and form. But, I do not want to inadvertently turn open invitations into closed assignments or to make a task dull or mundane. If I do this, writing becomes merely an exercise in spelling correctly.

The children confidently approach me at their writing conference on this particular day, knowing that most of the words they have spelled are correct. They are. But, do I want the children to merely cooperate with me and my wishes or do I want them to genuinely care and collaborate with me in their spelling endeavors?

Tyler forces me to re-think my beliefs. He shows awareness of the importance of conventions and yet I hold back, trying to convince him that conventions are secondary to the message he wants to communicate.

*Tyler and I are settling down for a conference to look at his writing. He wants to write a joke to be read on the morning announcements. Tyler knows that the principal needs to be able to read what he has written, so he is reading his writing to me, for the second time, with his pencil poised in his hand, ready to do some beginning 'editing'. On his paper, he has written, WT DU U COL A PRPL CW? (What do you call a purple cow?) "Help me spell all the words right," he tells me. "You've done a good job. I think Mrs. Hartman will be able to read it," I tell him.*

*"NO! I need to know the right way to spell these words," he protests.  
 "Can you get your personal dictionary?" I ask. He runs to the bin  
 which holds his personal dictionary.  
 "Wuh, wuh, wuh, I'm looking for 'what'... where do I find it? Is it at  
 the beginning or at the end? Is it a 'y'? Wuh-uh-tuh." He rapidly  
 flips through the pages, not knowing where to start.*

Tyler is a risk taker who spells words according to what he knows and has a desire and concern for spelling accuracy. He is aware that spelling plays a role in his ability to communicate with the school principal. Tyler trusts that I will help him with this important task and I feel like I have let him down. As I observe Tyler, I am faced with a dilemma: I want to convey the importance of conventional spelling to him, as he is writing for an outside audience, but I also want to value his approximations and have him work towards convention through a process of his own. Most of all, I want to convey my belief in him as a writer. I am hesitant to give Tyler the spelling of a word, worrying that this action might encourage him to become dependent on me to spell words he does not know. The action I did suggest - that he look in his personal dictionary - is frustrating him. I recognize it is too soon to expect him to find the words in any kind of personal or class dictionary, because he does not yet have enough knowledge of the letters in each word. I want Tyler to experience success and yet his need to spell conventionally is urgent and requires a split second decision on my part. How do I both support my belief system and serve his immediate need?

Personal dictionaries are a spelling resource in our classroom, though I wonder to myself if they are more decorative than functional, making it look as if we are attending to spelling in a familiar and comforting way to parents. Most teachers I know have these dictionaries proudly on display, whereas I have them hidden in a bin. It is evident that most children do not find this resource either useful or interactive. It seems to be a record

of past needs, rather than being a tool that creates new meanings or generates excitement about language for the children. In Tyler's case, I believe that I have imposed this tool before he is developmentally ready to use it. The personal dictionary provides me with a surface "accountability", but it is not really serving a purposeful role for some of the children in the class.

Both of the above critical incidents help me to recognize that maybe this kind of "balance" is not what the children need or what I want. In my heart, I know I am not seeking a balanced instructional approach, which amounts to nodding in the direction of a few skills activities that add to the curriculum I am trying to shape. Curriculum has to be more than just a grab bag of activities. At times, I feel like I am working too hard and expending too much energy presenting a smorgasboard of ideas, mostly to show something tangible to parents. I wonder if the myriad of spelling activities in our classroom have been attempts to cover a mandatory spelling curriculum. Instead, should I not be searching for alternative spelling frameworks that will better support the teaching and my own learning within the classroom?

As I contemplate my commitment to the role of inquiry in young children's learning, I feel more convinced that something is not right about the way I am presently perceiving spelling. In our classroom, I believe, as Shelley Harwayne states (2001), that "the writing process approach and spelling instruction do support one another" (p.227). What is less obvious to me is how spelling and collaborative inquiry support one another in our learning community. At this point, they seem to be separate entities, existing parallel to one another, but not interconnecting, as I feel they should.

I am uncertain about how to approach our language learning differently. While there is room for student choice and ownership in the reading and writing that we do, much of the strategy instruction tends to be more teacher directed or at least teacher chosen (based on observations) and not as much a collaborative inquiry where we share the decision making as a learning community. While children write for a variety of reasons, across curriculum areas and engage in open-ended writing possibilities, spelling seems to exist outside of this collaborative inquiry framework. I understand the authoring cycle (Short & Harste, 1996) where children build from the known, take time to find questions for inquiry, gain new perspectives, attend to differences, share what they learn, plan new inquiries and take thoughtful new action. We live this in our classroom as readers, writers and inquirers. But when I view spelling as just one part of this writing process, I have a hard time conceptualizing how it could become part of an inquiry cycle. While I begin from where children are developmentally, I rarely take the time to help them find their questions or to see spelling as an opportunity to inquire. While spelling is something we attend to, it does not seem to have the substance that would afford the kind of inquiry studies we normally engage in. There are always aspects of a study that pique all children's interests and the generation of new knowledge always ignites a spark in our classroom. Yet, if I believe in the power of collaborative inquiry, then I feel the need to make some shifts in what we are currently doing with spelling. It is this tension that begins my year-long curriculum inquiry into the role of spelling in the learning of the children in my classroom.

## Planning the Curriculum Inquiry Around Spelling

As with any inquiry process we engage in, the cycle begins with an initial shared experience that draws out each learner's personal experiences and knowledge, questions and wonderings. The professional literature about spelling, my conversations with others, and the political tensions I feel push me to extend my learning and to ask questions that pertain to the particular group of students I am teaching. My personal inquiry begins with the following thoughts:

*How do the children envision themselves as language learners? Do they even think of themselves in this way? How can I empower them to think of themselves in this way? How do children learn about and come to know about patterns, rules and strategies? If children learn to talk by listening to others, trying phrases out and 'inventing' language, how can they do this around spelling with their classmates? What kinds of rich examples can we demonstrate for one another? Is spelling different in a child's world than in an adult's? If writing for an audience requires children to take a second look at their writing, am I saying that it doesn't matter at other times? Can we have some sense of responsibility for one another? (TNC Journal, 10/16/1998)*

My questions cannot be answered in isolation and require the children and their experiences in the classroom to inform my planning. Thinking of a way to set up and plan a curricular inquiry about spelling poses an initial challenge. I struggle with knowing how or where to begin. In a content area study, we may take an excursion to a related site, interview an expert in their field or engage in some fascinating hands-on materials that allow children to explore an idea further. This generates enthusiasm and we proceed from this engagement, exploring our questions and wonderings. But spelling... how could I "build from the known" (Short, Burke, Harste, 1996) and facilitate a conversation that would allow the children to reflect upon their personal experiences and knowledge of spelling, as well as articulate their questions?

My first attempt at approaching an inquiry about spelling is to treat it like a content area study and to ask questions that may raise anomalies or wonderings for this group of students. This discussion has the potential to make our thought processes explicit and can become a common experience from which we base our further explorations into spelling. I am thinking ahead to how children can document this experience, making the process of their thinking visible. My hopes are high as I receive the children's blank stares when trying to generate their wonderings about spelling as a topic. The conversation becomes much more teacher-directed than I am comfortable with, but I proceed to ask more specific questions such as: "What is hard for you about spelling? What do you wonder about? What questions do you have? What are you discovering as a speller?" All of these questions are an attempt to frame the process and to see if the children can articulate what they seem interested in pursuing, giving me a lead-in or a place to start. While the children are active participants and have some interesting questions, it becomes evident that we are only touching upon the surface. Their questions are not really relevant to the process that I see us engaging in. They ask, "Who decided to call spelling, spelling?" "Who invented words?" "Who invented spelling?" They also see spelling as needing to be "correct" and being about "memorizing words I need to know". Despite my efforts to move them into a new conversation, the children are looking for factual information and there are no significant leads that have the potential to take us in an interesting direction. At this point, I realize we can not proceed in quite the same manner as we would with an inquiry study and so I search for another angle from which to develop a meaningful curriculum around spelling.



My second attempt comes by surprise, when I decide to dust off a diagnostic baseline assessment test that I am required to administer. My own frustration is not with the test itself, but how I have seen it used - by teachers who view it as a tool that keeps them looking accountable, as they display the test marks to parents at conference times to show improvement or lack of improvement. Every year I go through the motions of giving this test because I have to, but this year I decide to lessen the formality of the test and take small groups aside during our Choice Time, to informally observe the children in this kind of situation. All of the children around the table are ones with whom I have relationships and so I feel that they will be comfortable in this somewhat unusual and unnatural situation. I do not demand silence or limit conversation, which I suppose some may say would limit the validity of this test. As someone who questions the validity of this kind of test in the first place and who would choose not to make this a regular practice in her classroom, I ironically gain considerable insight into spelling from the children's conversations (indeed, more insights than I have gained from my attempts to approach spelling as an inquiry, at the onset of this particular week). I begin to listen to this thoughtful group of children who think out loud as they are given a random list of words.

*The children are anticipating the next word that I will read on the 'master' list. I read number 13 - bell. "The fire bell rang." Brennan smiles and looks around to see if others have made any connections. He obviously has. He is sure of how to spell bell. He whispers to me, "Easy - it's my last name."*

*"Number 16 - may. Mother, may we go skating?"*

*Maynard calls out, saying, "That's like my name everyone, except it is without the ending." Most children nod their heads, knowingly.*

*Brad pipes in, "It's also like the month that my birthday is in!"*

*All these connections that bring meaning to the words they are spelling.*

*"Number 19 - ill. The baby was ill."*

*"What does ill mean?" Gregor asks.*

*"It's the same as the word sick," Steve says.*

*"Would that be like in my dad's name, Bill?" Amy wonders quietly.*

*"Or like, until?"*

Language learning is personal and children obviously make connections between what they know best in a new situation. Their own names and their classmates' names are an integral part of the environmental print that has been the focus of our attention since the beginning of the year. Both Brennan and Maynard visualize their names when thinking about how to spell a word. Brad knows that his birthday falls in the month of May and recognizes that even though this is not the same kind of "may" in the sentence, he has some background information upon which to base his thinking. Amy rhymes the word "ill" with her dad's name, Bill, making a functional connection to what she already knows. She also raises an interesting question for herself, noting that "until" could possibly have a relationship to the word, "ill". This conversation confirms for me that spelling is more than memorization. I agree with Sandra Wilde (1991) when she says,

*An important point to remember is that when spellings are constructed out of our knowledge about language rather than just remembered, the spelling is an invented one even if it happens to be correct. 'Invention' refers to the process, not the product (p.4).*

These children are constructing meaning and are doing much better than just making random guesses or relying on memorized recall. They are drawing upon their previous knowledge and are taking information they are confident about and applying it in a new situation. Amy exhibits spelling as a thought process. Gregor's point is well taken - how often in the English language do we use the word 'ill'? I would guess that Gregor has not heard this word and has probably never encountered it in his reading. It is fascinating that this thought collective reviews what they know about language in order to make a deliberate decision. Can this be what spelling is all about?

The community's collaborative attempts add depth to an individual's attempts. Members of the group can inform one another and support individual learners. I wonder if articulating strategies and understandings in "kid terms" are more easy to understand when their peers present these ideas.

The Schonell spelling test does not serve as a valuable baseline assessment for me in my classroom. In fact it does not help to determine which spelling group I want to channel the children into, it does not assist me in developing graded word lists, and it is not useful as a comparative statement for parents in letting them know how their children are progressing as spellers. However, it does open a door to the possibilities that exist when children are given the opportunity to make their thinking public and are encouraged to articulate the strategies that they use when required to spell a word. It also helps me to shape my thinking and clarify what a spelling invitation within an inquiry may look like. We do not always need an activity or a specific initial experience to shape our curriculum. It is often much more helpful to observe and listen carefully to the children, jumping in or capitalizing upon their wonderings as they happen in the classroom. This experience is a critical one as it begins to cast spelling in a different light. It begins to change the way I think about children learning how to spell and their ability to make connections.

The following excerpt is my third attempt to build upon the collective knowledge base within the classroom. It begins with a look at the children's "Have A Go" (Routman, 1991) sheets. A "Have A Go" is done in the editing stage of the writing process where children choose words they know are misspelled and work through various attempts to spell the word correctly. The children are often guided through a process and asked to

think about various strategies they know when attempting the standard spelling. This example confirms the importance of allowing the children to draw upon the connections they have already made and to spend time capitalizing upon the vast knowledge base within our own classroom community.

*'Ph' or 'F'?*

*I'm with my oldest children on the carpet during word study time. My intent is to look at their "Have A Go" sheets and talk about why they think we're doing this 'exercise' and how it relates to their writing process. I've photocopied a few of their "Have A Go" sheets because I want to initiate a conversation about what I've noticed that children are doing when they're thinking about spelling. We're looking at Brad's sheet. His copy word is spelled g-r-a-f. On his first try, he spells it 'g-r-a-p-h'. I ask him, "How did you know on your first try that graph ended with a ph?"*

*Brad replies with a, "I just knew"...*

*Braeden then interjects and says, "When I read 'Phoebe' in the Magic School Bus, I thought it should have started with an F, but it was a 'Ph'.*

*What a startling discovery. Braeden's not only connecting his reading to his writing, but also has made sense (I would guess) of the television show where he heard the word, 'Phoebe'. We talk about this some more, after I've made a dramatic production of his discovery. I remember out loud when I first saw the word 'Phoebe', that I pronounced it "Phobe". The kids laugh. How did I ever make the connection that the word was "Phoebe"? Probably because I met someone with that name and realized that I had been mispronouncing it.*

*Braeden adds, "Ralphie, who is also a character in the Magic School Bus has a 'ph' in his name, too."*

*We start generating a list of 'ph' words the kids know. I am amazed at how many words they know that have the 'ph' at the beginning. They aren't naming any words that begin with 'f'. How clearly they can share this information and more importantly, how engaging this is for the other children, who can contribute to the conversation in 'kid terms'. (TNC, Journal, 11/29/1998)*

Copy Word	1st try	2nd try	Standard Spelling
Myth	mye	myex	mine
pot	phot	put	put
between	beetwen	between	between
wethr wis	weather wis	weather wise	
graph	graph	getaph	graph
			When I found
			Hagie
			I thought it
			was a
			but
			a ph
	ph		
	graph	fawn	
	phone		
	Phys. Ed.		
	Phillip		
	Phoebe		
	Ralphie		

Figure 3. 'Ph' and 'F' "Have A Go" sheet

As in the Schonell spelling story, the children are building from what they know. They use this opportunity as a way of exploring their knowledge of language and create new understandings based on their current use of spelling within their writing. The children have the ability to make generalizations about spelling rules and to apply them to different situations. My question has allowed us to generate new meaning together. The children's explanations as well as their various language experiences demonstrate their knowledge about the use of 'ph' and of 'f', rather than me simply telling them. This is a thinking-centered curriculum where children are contributing their understandings

and looking for new examples and explanations for the discovery Brad makes. Brad's piece of writing is a catalyst for this discussion, and yet it is Braeden who capitalizes upon the discovery and shares his experience, creating a much richer conversation than we could have had in a one-on-one conference situation. My role is as a facilitator, adding to the conversation and guiding the process.

Significant to this experience is the excitement that the process generates for the children and the recognition that they can, indeed, generate knowledge together and teach one another. The children help me to see that "building from the known" (Short, Harste, Burke, 1996) is more than just using my observations of the children and building upon these findings. It can also mean providing the children with a meaningful context - one which will allow them to explore and make connections they have not made before, and one which will allow time for them to share what they have learned so that they can act as resources for one another. I feel confident about creating a forum for more children to add their voices to this beginning conversation and to planning curriculum engagements that will allow them to examine their understandings of language and their learning process.

## **Chapter Two: Curriculum Engagements**

## **The WOW Wall: Approaching Spelling as a Collaborative Inquiry**

"As students move into focused inquiry, they need others to think with in order to explore their issues more deeply and intensely. Because we believe that it is through collaboration that students gain new perspectives and outgrow their current selves, we wanted to encourage students to form groups where they are pushed to consider new ideas and to explain their thinking to others" (Short, Burke & Harste, 1996, p.271).

All this talk about language begins to create a hum in the room, as the children offer new perspectives, reflect upon their spelling insights and show a genuine interest in one another's writing discoveries. New questions are being generated, small epiphanies are being made, and we all start to think about how we may organize and display our new knowledge. The children suggest that they could record what they are learning in their personal dictionary, but recognize that this alphabetically organized resource has limited use. Not only do these words get tucked away, leaving them "out of sight, out of mind", but the dictionaries do not teach the important conversations they are having with one another. We are looking at more than just words and want to remember our discussions and foster new connections as children read, write and spell in the classroom. I want the children to have a way to visually placeholder their discoveries so they can build upon their current learning, as it evolves, changes and grows as we pursue what is beginning to feel like an inquiry around language. We share the desire to create a paper trail that will illustrate the spelling curriculum that is emerging and that will map out our thinking for future reference.

Since we are starting to approach spelling as a collaborative inquiry and to move into more focused engagements, the pressure is on to maintain the momentum and to extend the children's conversations in a planned, but not contrived manner. After



receiving an email from Wayne Serebrin, I re-think the name I have given to what we call "word study" time.

*"... I would suggest that you call this time "language study" as opposed to "word study" because the issues will be larger than words. You and the children talk about your common strategies (you make these visible and public), and yet the "what" --where, when... each of you learned what you learned is unique to your personal experience."*

It makes sense to view spelling as language, not as a specific set of skills or words that we are studying. Learning about words seems skill-based. Learning about language seems like an inquiry. This is more consistent with my set of beliefs. Michael Halliday (1975) has helped me to understand that in any meaningful language experience, children have the opportunity to learn language, learn about language, and learn through language. A meaningful spelling experience should have the same implications, providing the opportunity to learn spelling, learn about spelling, and learn through spelling. This time together, where we look at examples of writing or highlight spelling patterns and strategies within a meaningful context, is newly named Language Study. It opens doors to the possibility of exploring and generating ideas that add to our existing knowledge base as a classroom community. This new mindset has me listening and looking around the classroom in new ways during writing time.

Bryn and Amelia begin, what I think, is the first shift in our thinking and address Halliday's (1975) notion of learning spelling, learning about spelling and learning through spelling, while engaged in the process of inquiry. The children are involved in different writing invitations, in response to their reading of The Bear, by Raymond Briggs. Amelia, while writing a letter to the author, comes to a spot in her writing that is puzzling for her.

*I thought the first page was  
neat because the bear was  
coming in. It started small and got bigger.*

I thought the first page was neat because the bear was coming in. It started small and got bigger.

---

Figure 4. Reading response of The Bear - Amelia

Amelia is in the middle of writing an interesting idea. I watch her stop and linger for a few moments. She walks over to the recycling bin and writes the word out once. She carefully looks at it and shakes her head. She cautiously asks, "Is this the way to spell 'bigger'?" I assume she anticipates my upcoming remark. "Hmm... does it look right to you?" She smiles and says, "No, but... I want to try to 'Have A Go'... if I can think of a word that rhymes with it, it may help me." She is aware of the strategies she can use. I nod and tell her to come back in a couple of minutes to share what she discovers. She wanders over to her table and starts to talk with all of the children. I am with another child having a writing conference, but before I know it Amelia is back.

"So? What did you find?" I ask her. Well, I've tried it a number of ways and it still doesn't look right. We did find a word that rhymes with bigger," she says. "It's Tigger." I am grinning now and we both look at each other knowingly. I have made a connection, but I want Amelia to make the same connection that I have. "Hmm... I wonder who is an expert about Winnie the Pooh in this class?" I say aloud. It comes as no surprise when she exclaims, "Bryn!" Bryn is our resident expert on Winnie the Pooh. His notebook has Tigger on it, he has Disney clothing, and his bedroom walls are adorned with Winnie the Pooh paper. After being together for 3 years, I know in a

second that Amelia will make this connection to one of her loved friends. She shuffles over.

They talk for just a moment. As I watch from across the room, I see Bryn beaming. They are nodding their heads and Amelia comes over and says, "I've got it now. Bryn knew." I ask her to get Bryn and come and tell me about how they make this discovery.

*T: Amelia, I want you to tell me, what happened when you were spelling in your letter to Raymond Briggs, the author of The Bear... tell me what happened when you got to the word 'bigger' and you were puzzled about how to spell it.*

*A: Well, I had a "Have A Go" and I can't remember how many times I tried it.*

*T: Why did you decide that you didn't know how to spell 'bigger'? What made you make that decision?*

*A: Well, because I didn't know that there were two 'g's'.*

*T: Okay... so how did you come to know that? You "had a go", then what?*

*A: And then...umm...I went to Bryn and asked how he would spell 'Tigger'...*

*T: What did you say, Bryn?*

*B: It's spelled T, I, double /g/(guh), er*

*T: Where have you heard that before?*

*B: When Tigger says his name a lot in the movies.*

*T: So, what does he say? T, I, double /g/, er. Now, how did you remember that?*

*B: Well, it is so easy to remember because I usually watch Winnie the Pooh movies on... ummm... I have a lot of Winnie the Pooh videos, and in the first movie, he does that.*

This story involves children consulting one another during writing process time, sharing their background knowledge and conferencing about a topic relevant to their spelling (writing) inquiry. They draw upon their connections to books and movies, while demonstrating the power of their relationships - knowing one another as learners and capitalizing upon different children's interests and strengths. Bryn's area of expertise in Winnie the Pooh comes as no surprise, yet he demonstrates that he can use his knowledge to assist Amelia in an entirely different context than he normally would. He relates his experience of this loved creature within a language context, helping Amelia figure out the

spelling of 'bigger'. Together, they pursue this inquiry, doing as Harste (1993) says, "creating, critiquing and transcending their present realities" (p.5). Amelia seeks knowledge from Bryn, making an authentic connection with him in a way that I, as her teacher, cannot. I may have given her an example (perhaps, removed from her experience), give her a rule about doubling the consonant, or I may have drawn upon other words that have a similar pattern. None of these demonstrations would have the same power that Bryn's teaching has had for her.

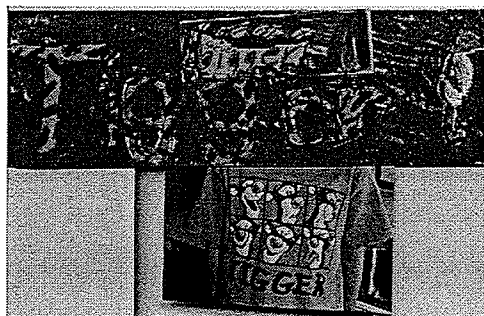
I decide to let this inquiry take center stage at our mini-lesson the next morning. We gather together and I begin by sharing all my wonderings and my personal inquiry questions about children learning how to spell.

*"I wonder how children make sense of spelling and as I talk with you, I find that you know some fascinating kinds of things that I think are worth sharing at our group time. I am excited about what you teach me because it is like we are discovering new things together that will help us as spellers. It's kind of like when we acted like entymologists when we did our study of insects and when we acted as historians when we did our Long Ago study and..." (TNC Journal, 03/12/1999)*

Jayson interrupts me, "Well, it is like a scientist too, when we acted like scientists with the white lab coats... a scientist discovers things that the world hasn't discovered yet - like my dad!"

"Yes, Jayson," I say, nodding my head in agreement. "That's exactly what it is. We're trying to discover things that we may not have discovered before in this classroom or it may just be that we re-discover something we have always known but have never shared together. It may be new information to someone in the class. I'm going to call it a WOW because when I hear you talking about it, I think, "Wow! That's a neat discovery!" It is something that we need to share with everyone."

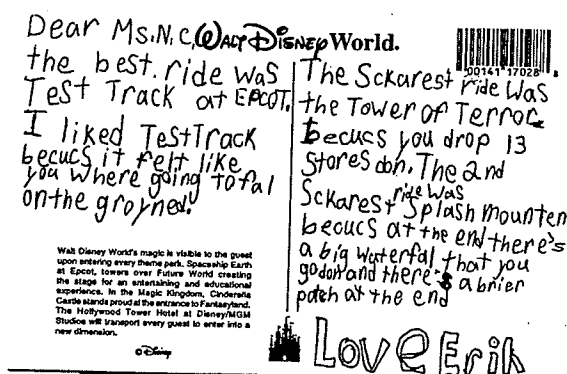
From a disciplinary perspective, we are acting as language learning researchers, pursuing a specific focus on spelling. We are in the midst of exploring what this research process looks like through mini-lessons, conferences and strategy sharing experiences. I proceed by asking Amelia and Bryn to share their discovery with the group. "This is definitely our first "wow!", Ms. Nishibata-Chan," Craig says as the group is chanting in a whispery voice, "T-I-double /g/(guh)-er". In the back of my head, I'm thinking of the 'doubling of the consonant' rule and thinking about how we can apply this to a future mini-lesson. This is the first real lead that we are exploring and the thought of making discoveries and inquiring about spelling fascinates the children. Amelia and Bryn record their discovery on a flashcard-like piece of paper, taking time to carefully illustrate the card so that children who may not be able to read the word, will notice the tiger-like stripes on the letters. A couple of days later, Amelia and Bryn pull a child from another classroom aside and ask to take a snapshot of her t-shirt, so that this can be yet another prompt, reminding the class of this first "wow" that they discovered. They impress upon me the importance of using alternate sign systems, such as art and the photograph, as another way of creating and sharing meaning with their younger classmates.



---

Figure 5. "Tigger" WOW

I have also brought Erin's postcard from Disneyland with me to this discussion, so he can talk about a conversation that we have had earlier on in the week. This story takes place the first day back after spring break. Erin bounces into the classroom, having just arrived back from a trip to Disneyworld, eager to tell us of his travels. He has a postcard clutched in his hand and passes it to me, as he emerges from the coatroom. He asks if he can read it to me later and then quickly escapes to the carpet where all of the other children are awaiting his stories. We wait until before recess and his eyes sparkle as he proceeds to read his postcard to me:



Dear Ms. N.C. The best ride was Test Track because it felt like you were going to fall on the ground. The scariest ride was the Tower of Terror because you drop 13 stories down. The second scariest ride was Splash Mountain because at the end there is a big waterfall that you go down and there is a briar patch at the end. Love, Erin.

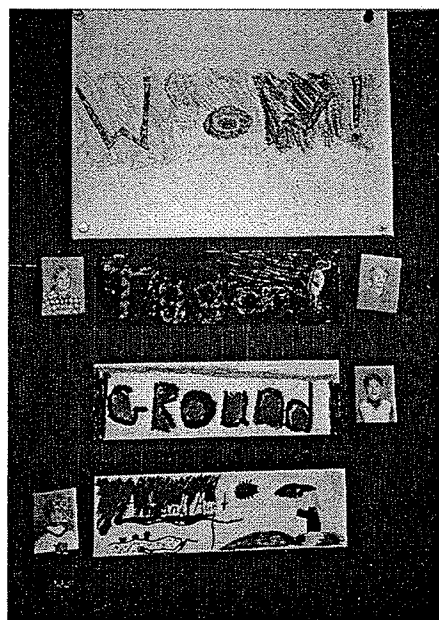
Figure 6. Erin's postcard

Erin stops and looks up at me sheepishly. "I know that *groyned* isn't right because it doesn't look right, but I didn't feel like correcting it, because I wrote in pen," he says. "Interesting, that you noticed it didn't look right. Good spellers notice those kinds of things," I say. He continues to read. After reading the whole postcard, Erin's finger travels back to the word *groyned*. "I know how to spell 'ground', you know." "You do?" I pretend to be surprised. "Yes, it's g-r-o-u-n-d. I was just playing and not thinking too much." He smiles.

As we recall the beginnings of this story for the class, we place Erin's postcard on the overhead so he can talk about his writing and his discovery. The rest of the class is all ears as he says, "When I was writing, I knew that ground didn't look right to me, but I wrote it that way anyways." The children are nodding their heads, agreeing that it doesn't quite look right to them. "Let's HAVE A GO," someone exclaims. This is what is generated:

- *groyned* "No, still doesn't look right."
- *groned* "That would be like groaning, when someone is sick or complaining," Craig states.
- *ground* "That's got to be it, because it is like 'round'," Amy says.

"Let's make a list of other rhyming words that we know with the same -ound ending," I say. Hands start waving and the children are calling out, "pound, hound, found, sound, bound". "Can we put these in our class dictionary?" someone calls out. "Let's make a WOW board and Erin can write it out as a discovery for the class," I say. The children name this the "ground WOW". Erin placeholders this discovery on paper and adds it underneath Bryn and Amelia's "Tigger WOW". Our WOW wall starts to evolve as we start posting our discoveries up on a bulletin board in a visually pleasing manner. The children want their photographs beside their discovery, not only for recognition, but also because they feel they can be a resource for others who may need their help. The enthusiasm builds as they become celebrities on what we name THE WOW WALL.




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Figure 7. The WOW wall

These two language learning opportunities are worth celebrating and highlighting for the other children in the class. It is fascinating to watch one child's inquiry evolve and take on a life of its own. Back to Halliday's (1975) notion, all children are *learning to spell* by engaging in writing and reading experiences that permeate the classroom environment on a daily basis. Amelia is an active participant in initiating and negotiating a language learning curriculum. Both she and Erin show interest in asking their personal questions and exploring their wonderings in relation to spelling challenges that come their way during writing process time. All three children (Amelia, Erin and Bryn) are beginning to see spelling as a process of meaning making, where the conversation around the word is as much a part of spelling as actually spelling the word correctly. Amelia mostly engages in conversation with Bryn and then reflects upon this in a whole-class gathering. Erin interacts with the group and shares his thinking. One idea generates

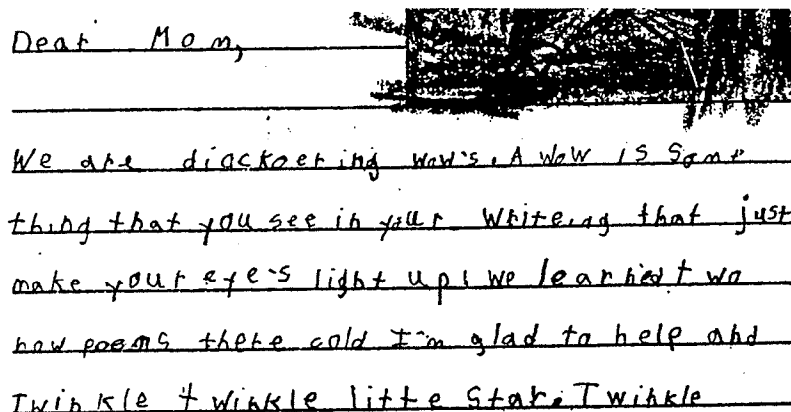


another idea, especially when we brainstorm around possible spellings for the word, 'ground'. Amelia and Bryn's mini-lesson and the 'ground' strategy sharing give the children an opportunity to *learn about spelling*, to examine language in use as well as an opportunity to see the learning process in action. The children learn about themselves and each other as learners as they *learn through language*. They all take ownership and responsibility for their learning within a community that invites listening and participation. This context allows them to see that the teacher is not the only resource, but that other children too can assist with their learning process and help them generate knowledge. All the children have a need to know each other well, both as learners and as individuals who have a wide range of interests. By doing this, the children are able to tap into one another's passions, like Bryn's love for Winnie the Pooh or Erin's enthusiasm about a trip, when writing and spelling. The learning is more dynamic when children are making personal connections through a social process. These relationships allow children to "feed off" of one another and create new understandings.

## One Child's Inquiry: Developing a Spelling Consciousness

There is a spiralling effect taking place as the children re-visit and reflect upon the WOW wall, pursue their current understandings and look for fresh conversations to capture their interests. A new sense of direction begins to emerge as we build upon our shared experiences as a class, but individual children also have their own personal agendas to pursue within the larger context of this study. One child's spelling inquiry captures my interest. Ian is learning about language, but more importantly has the desire to understand his own learning process when engaging in spelling.

Ian is a child who, when passionate about something, pursues it, exploring, experimenting and joyfully playing with an idea until he exhausts its possibilities. Shortly after our inquiry takes center stage, Ian summarizes a highlight of his week:



Dear Mom,

We are discovering wow's. A wow is some thing that you see in your writing that just make your eyes light up! We learned two new poems they are called I'm glad to help and Twinkle Twinkle little star. Twinkle

Dear Mom, We are discovering WOW's. A WOW is something that you see in your writing that just makes your eyes light up! We learned two new poems. They are called, "I'm Glad to Help" and "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star".

Figure 8. Ian's reflection

Ian is only six, yet desperately wants to make a language discovery that no one else has made. He is particularly enthusiastic about the unveiling of our WOW wall and not only celebrates other children's discoveries, but is eager to contribute a connection of

his own. Ian approaches his writing with such determination, wishing and hoping for something to make his eyes "light up" as he writes his weekly letter home. It is fascinating to see the *spirit* with which he actively pursues this new found interest in language. Lilian Katz (1985) categorizes this as a "disposition" to learn or a "habit of mind or tendency to respond to a certain situation in a certain way" (p.2). She proceeds to say that

"there is a significant difference between having writing skills and having the disposition to be a writer... Dispositions are not learned through instruction or drill. The dispositions that children need to acquire or strengthen -- curiosity, creativity, cooperation, friendliness - are learned primarily from being around people who exhibit them" (p.2)

Ian's disposition towards spelling is a learning goal he believes is worth pursuing for the benefit of the entire community. As we pursue spelling as an inquiry, my goal for all of the children is to strengthen dispositions such as curiosity, creativity and openness, while also attending to strategies, skills and the acquisition of new words. I believe there is a direct correlation between a child's positive attitude towards spelling and the development of a spelling consciousness, which seem basic to becoming a good speller. It is important for me to find ways to support Ian, as a beginning writer, and to publicly celebrate his discoveries (and enthusiasm) with his peers. Ian's inquiry has the potential to start group discussions and positively charge this group of learners.

One morning Ian comes to school clutching a wad of paper in his hand and waving it in the air. "I have something important to share. I spent all last night working on it." We gather around him during morning sharing and he proceeds to tell us that he has spent the evening, acting like a detective as he flipped through his writer's notebook. Ian clarifies that he has not done any new writing, but he has carefully read through his

old writing and has discovered some interesting things. He has a list in his hand, obviously generated from his writer's notebook. To me, it looks like a random list of words, some spelled correctly and others circled. I wonder what epiphany Ian has had...

Cock h  
 hösse yrfde  
 door hand room  
 flar Note Book  
 Song Sock  
 Shoos  
 tooth gran  
 milk  
 foot BicR  
 Othp nosey  
 fish ross  
 fury  
 school  
 fechr

Figure 9. Ian's "thinking" artifact

"Well," Ian says, "I decided that this could be a thinking 'artifact' (we have used this word when collecting items for our OLDEN DAYS Museum) for our WOW wall, if you agree," he pauses, scanning all of the children and looking directly at me.

"What makes it an 'artifact', Ian?," I say, puzzled by his choice of words.

"Well, I think that it shows my thinking and I think I worked really hard at it, kind of like an oldest kid might, but I am a youngest kid."

"Go ahead, tell us what you were thinking."

"Well, I wrote down words from my writer's notebook that I thought weren't spelled correctly," he proceeds. "Then I looked at some of them and noticed that there were things that were the same AND different, so I 'had a go' and I also used different 'strategies' to find the correct spelling."

"Okay, can you give us a few examples?"

He pulls out a sheet in his pile of papers that looks similar to our 'have a go' sheet (not yet used by the youngest children) and points out the words, flower, other and teacher.

	1	2	
1	hosse	house →	house
2	flar	flower →	flower
3	othet	other →	other
4	funy	funny →	funny
5	techt	teacher →	teacher
6	ytrde	yard →	yard
7	shoos	shoes →	shoes
8	yarn	yarn →	yarn
9	Bick	Bike →	Bike
10	nase	nase →	nase

Figure 10. Ian's version of a "Have A Go"

"I had some help from my grandma with the beginning parts, he said, but I found out by myself that they all end with 'er'. When you say them, it sounds like only 'r', but it is really 'er'."

"Did you find that in a book? How did you know?" a classmate asks.

"My auntie's name is Heather and guess what? Her name is like the end of flower, other and teacher." Ian is smiling proudly. Amy reminds him that he uses a strategy similar to her when she used her Dad's name, Bill, to spell other words like will, spill, chill.

"Other interesting things you discovered, Ian?" I ask.

"Yes, but I didn't figure them all out by myself like the Auntie Heather one. I just noticed them and Grandma helped me figure them out," he says. "Like, I noticed that I used a lot of words that had 2 of the same letters beside each other. They don't even sound the same, but I used them!!" He is emphatic about the words not sounding the same. "Like door ("Can I write them on the board?" he asks), room, notebook, shoos, tooth, foot and school. They all have two /o/'s, but they don't make the same sound. And look," he laughs. "I even put two /s/'s in house, which was wrong and I put two /r/'s in yard, which was wrong."

While Ian's discoveries are not necessarily earth-shattering or even that new to the process we have been engaging in, it is extremely exciting for him to share his learning and articulate the process that is going on in his head. He does not intend to publish these pieces of writing, which he never even shows us. His writer's notebook has

become a place to find spellings that intrigue him and he uses these spellings to try out what he sees others doing. I think it is admirable that he generates his own "Have A Go" sheet, with the help of an adult, though my guess is that he does not really understand how a "Have A Go" works. On glancing at his "Have A Go", I recognize that the way he sets up the sheet does not show him discriminating between different spellings, but moves him immediately into conventional spelling. This is his current perception of what spelling is about; getting the words spelled correctly is important to him. While listening to him talk about his thinking process, it is evident that he is beginning to visually discriminate between the look of words and the way they sound, like in his 'doubling of the vowel' discovery. Margaret Moustafa (1998) says that, "what is important however is that those who write what they hear (or who use 'invented spelling') should gradually begin to focus more consciously on the visual aspects of the spelling system" (p.20). Ian is developing a spelling "consciousness" and is beginning to focus on the visual aspects of the spelling system. He discovers that the English language is not completely predictable. Most of all, he is curious and makes smart observations, moving along the continuum that Moustafa (1998) talks about:

*"We can represent children's hypotheses about spelling, therefore, as being on a continuum. At one end of the continuum is a purely visual hypothesis ('spelling words by remembering the look of a word') and at the other end is an aural hypothesis ('the sound of words is the best guide to their spelling'). It is important that children at all points on this continuum are helped towards a fuller understanding of how the spelling system really works." (p.20)*

Ian's enthusiasm motivates others and he is pleased that everyone responds so positively to his discovery. While he contributes to the WOW wall, there is more to this inquiry than that. As his teacher, I see this as an opportunity to introduce Ian to the way a "Have A Go" truly works and to communicate through my teaching that this strategy

should be perceived as a process and for a purpose, and that it is not just about 'going through the motions' to get the correct spelling from an adult. He is open to this mini-lesson and seems ready to use this strategy authentically and purposefully when writing. Ian is driven to figure things out for himself and make sense of this whole inquiry about spelling in his own writing.

A few weeks later, I receive this letter from Ian, in response to the book, The BFG, by Roald Dahl that we are reading aloud as a class.

The BFG      APR 21 1999

I was surprised that the BFG did  
not eat soffey that is because  
the BFG does not eat people. That  
the other giants eat people.  
not other another  
because  
because  
because  
these are wows  
because I had to think wely hard  
about my words and how they  
were spelt. I think these wows  
because the words are so  
tuff to get the cekt spelling.

reapel  
poapel  
parel  
people

I was surprised that the BFG did not eat Sophie that is because the BFG does not eat people. That the other giants eat people. These are Wow's because I had to think really hard about my words and how they were spelled. I think they are Wow's because the words are sort of tough to get the correct spelling.

Figure 11. Reading response to The BFG - Ian

This letter has an intended audience and it is evident that Ian is playing with the idea of how he may use the "Have A Go" strategy so that it is helpful and of use to him as he writes. From an early childhood perspective, I love how Ian's playful behaviour leads

him to construct his own understanding of a concept and how doing so is essential to his development as a speller. I believe that Ian is more likely to implement a strategy and remember how to spell something when he engages in it firsthand and through a meaningful experience. He participated in the mini-lesson but was not told exactly when to use the "Have A Go". This needed to be determined by him. Ian can make spelling choices and is coming to understand the context in which making such choices is necessary. Creating a learning environment that facilitates this kind of play and allows children to think through their own role and their use of a strategy takes time and raises questions for me. What is the proper balance between incidental versus structured or child-centered versus teacher-led play with language? Is it my role to plan specific play experiences that will lead to predictable outcomes? To what extent should the individual developmental needs of each child determine the agenda of these play and learning experiences?

This piece of writing also shows Ian's growing understanding of the strategy in use (as a process, not just 'going through the motions' to end up with a product - the correct spelling). It documents his learning and demonstrates growth as he makes his thinking explicit. As Ian tries to articulate and reflect upon his thinking ("I think they are WOW's because the words are sort of tough to get the correct spelling."), he recognizes that some words simply are not spelled as they sound. This arouses Ian's curiosity and creates interest and an altered consciousness for him as a writer. Ian is approaching his writing with a different mindset and is thinking in ways that extend his knowledge of the use of conventions and how he is learning them. Writing in a non-threatening atmosphere allows him to take risks, ask questions, and answer many of his own



questions while he still maintains a sense of accomplishment and control. Extending an invitation to Ian to discover a WOW in his writing has been a productive expectation that, importantly, has him looking differently at his writing process.

## **Reading Like A Writer: A Collection of Lessons That Shape Our Spelling Inquiry**

So much of the time we spend on spelling is built into the time we spend on writing process. Writing process is also so well integrated into other areas of study that I feel we are placing spelling within its proper context. However, reading also builds spelling knowledge and is an important piece of developing a spelling curriculum. Knowing how to create an environment for this to happen and to situate reading experiences within an evolving spelling inquiry is a challenge. It is my intent to make this reading-writing-spelling connection explicit for the children, while continuing to honour their interests and inquiries as they proceed to document their learning for themselves and to share with others.

Children know or at least seem to acknowledge that being a reader helps their writing (evident in their interviews with me), yet I wonder if this is a conscious effort or if it is just something some children do more naturally than others. Are some children more visually aware of the words in front of them? Is this a developmental awareness? Is this something I can bring to their attention? Arden gives me the opportunity to explore the idea of "reading like a writer" when I respond to the content of his letter.

Dear Ms. N-C,  
 Did you know that I am done Charlie and the Chocolate Factory? Did you know that I am reading James and the Giant Peach, if you did not, I will tell you what is happening. I am at the part when the two ants see that the peach is growing bigger. The thing that I wonder is when the magic person comes, and gives James the crocodile tongues, why are they so small. (If you are wondering who that person is he is like almost the only one in the entire world that has those crocodile tongues). The crocodile tongues are magic, the old man said you can wish for anything and it'll come true. So far this book is really sad. At the start, James' mother and father both got eaten by a rhinoceros. James had to live with his two ants, ant sponge, ant spiker. They are very mean to James. They don't feed him right, make him do their chores, and use his name in bad language. I think James has a sad life.

Dear Ms. N-C, Did you know that I am done Charlie and the Chocolate Factory? Did you know that I am reading James and the Giant Peach, if you did not, I will tell you what is happening. I am at the part when the two *ants* (*Ant* Sponge and *Ant* Spiker) see that the peach is growing bigger. The thing that I wonder is when the magic person comes and gives James the crocodile tongues, why are they so small? (If you are wondering who that person is, he is like almost the only one in the entire world that has those crocodile tongues). The crocodile tongues are magic. The old man said you can wish for anything and it'll come true. So far this book is really sad. At the start, James' mother and father got eaten by a rhinoceros. James had to live with his two *ants*, *Ant* Sponge and *Ant* Spiker. They are very mean to James. They don't feed him right, make him do their chores, and use his name in bad language. I think James has a sad life.

Figure 12. Reading response to James and the Giant Peach - Arden

As I write back to Arden in his reading response journal, I wonder about the way he has used the words 'ant' and 'aunt' as he writes about James and the Giant Peach, the latest book he is reading. I want to bring this writing detail to his attention and have him think about it as a reader. It is rare for me to comment on form when responding to a letter, but I am curious to see if Arden will notice that I have used both words in different contexts as I write back to him. The way he uses these homophones hinders my

understanding as a reader of his writing and I want to see if he can clarify his intentions as we communicate about meaning.

I am wondering if the ants in the story are insects or are they relatives (aunts) that are ants? Is this confusing or what? I think it would be very clever if the aunt (Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spicker) were tiny ants. They sure sound mean, though. It must be very horrible for James to have to live with such mean people. Is he angry with them? Does he treat people in a mean way?

Are those crocodile tongues that they are talking about? Yuck!

It sounds sad to not have a mom or a dad. Does James have any sisters or brothers?

from,  
Ms. Kishikata - Ch.

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Figure 13. Question about 'aunts' and 'ants' - Ms. N-C

Arden notices the difference right away. This does not surprise me, but my observations tell me that he frequently uses homophones in the wrong places, so this is a common error that occurs in his writing. It is obvious that Arden understands the meaning and the spelling of these homophones, as he employs them correctly in his response back to me:

Now for your question. James aunts are like aunts and uncle, I spelled it like the insect kind of ants. Did you ever read the book?

---

Figure 14. Homophones: Response about 'aunts' and 'ants' - Arden

He is eager to share this with the class and introduce it as a WOW! Not only is it a lovely way to introduce homophones, but Arden has a purposeful reason to clarify his spelling. I (as a reader of his work) am trying to understand his message. The meaning changes, if I read the word as 'ant', the insect, or 'aunt', the relative.

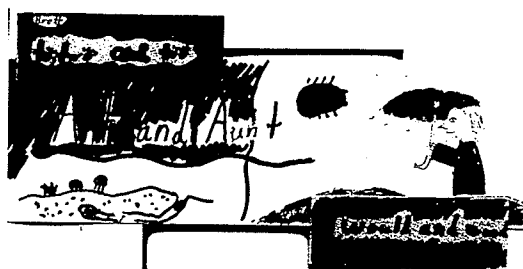


Figure 15. "Aunt and Ant" WOW

Arden and I have a conversation together, demonstrating our thinking out loud as we share his writing with the class. I am trying to nudge Arden to make his thinking explicit and to encourage him to share his process with the children. Gathering together as a group and talking about these discoveries allow each child's individual inquiry to powerfully inform the group's shared inquiry. Arden's is just one demonstration of how we can draw upon one another's writing and become each other's teachers. While the conversation may be lost on some of the children, it also sparks others' interests. The children who are developmentally ready and able to do so can follow Arden's pursuits.

*T: Do you want to share what your WOW was?*

*A: Well, my Wow was that I spelled 'ant' like 'uncle and aunt' (he is writing this on the overhead). I spelled the 'aunt', like 'uncle and aunt' like the insect kind of 'ant'. So when you read it, you think it is like the insects.*

*T: And are they insects?*

*A: No, they're really aunts, like 'aunt and uncle'.*

*T: And what do you know about the difference between those spellings?*

*A: Ummm... Aunt and uncle is spelled a-u-n-t-s and the insect kind of ant is spelled a-n-t.*

*T: Do both words sound the same, aunt and ant?*

*Whole class: Yes.*

T: Uh huh... so which one is the insect 'ant'? That's right. A-N-T. What's this kind of aunt? Yes, that's right, Tyler. So, Arden made this big discovery, because you see, in his writing, I was wondering if this kind of 'aunt' was an 'ant'. He told me, "No." Do you see how I was confused when I was reading his writing? Arden?

A: Because I think you know that James is a person, but if you read it, I spelled it 'aunt', so how could the 'ants' talk to James?

T: I wondered about that. I wondered if the ants were talking ants? There is a fancy name for this. Do you know what it is called when a word sounds the same but it means something different and it is spelled in a different way? Anyone know what it is called?

T: These are called HOMOPHONES. Can anyone give me another example of a homophone that they know of?

A: I have another one in my writing - wood and would.

T: Tell me the difference between the two.

A: Like, "Would you come to the store with me?" and "wood that you would chop for a fire"...

T: Yes, that's another one. Can you think of another one? Jay?

J: Two, like the number... To, like, "Ms. N-C, can you come to the store with me?" and too, kind of like the the word also.

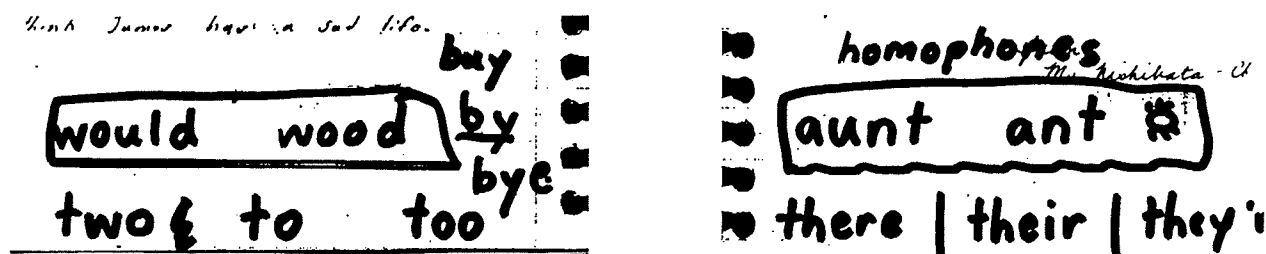


Figure 16. Whole class exploration of homophones

It is evident that this is more meaningful than a spelling book lesson that introduces homophones entirely out of context to children. On the one hand I know this, yet on the other hand, if homophones do not appear in the children's writing, when is an appropriate time to introduce this concept? I understand the safety net that a spelling book provides, allowing teachers to pick and choose from what they believe is a well researched and developmental sequence of skills. Yet, what about the enthusiasm and self-confidence that children bring to an experience when they discover something themselves, having experienced it directly as a writer? How does this impact what they

remember and apply to their future writing experiences? Watching this community of learners inquire into spelling in meaningful ways gives me a great deal of information about what to teach. It also gives us permission to have fun with an idea and explore it in as many ways as possible. I can cover my bases by addressing what we have to know, as directed by the provincial curriculum, but I also see my job as digging deeper and listening to what the children have to say - this impacts what I teach and what we learn from one another.

After this conversation, I find Arden looking at his writing differently, almost with a more critical eye. He is writing for content, but going back to proofread more carefully, after he is done with a piece. He does not leave this all until the end of the writing process. As Arden is writing, he circles or underlines words that he is not sure about, placeholdering these spellings, to be returned to later. This becomes an important part of his process, one that he has come to acknowledge as part of his learning experience. He does not hesitate to mark up his page with circles and willingly crosses out words, writing in his best attempt at the correct spelling.

Dear Mr. M.C.,  
 Now the peach ~~crack~~<sup>break</sup> off the stem  
 of the tree it ~~will~~<sup>will</sup> into the sea. I will  
 tell you how ~~humpy~~<sup>humpy</sup> it was. Well  
 you know that aunt ~~spang~~<sup>spang</sup> and aunt ~~spang~~<sup>spang</sup>  
 are ~~mean~~<sup>mean</sup> right. So that the ~~crackles~~<sup>crackles</sup>  
 went to have the hill. The ~~crackles~~<sup>crackles</sup>  
 went to have the ~~stern~~<sup>stern</sup>. When the  
 stern ~~crackles~~<sup>crackles</sup> it was a ~~humpy~~<sup>humpy</sup> ride  
 three ~~one~~<sup>one</sup> Aunt spang and aunt  
 spicker were so ~~shocked~~<sup>shocked</sup> they ran  
 in the ~~peach~~<sup>peach</sup> path. They both got  
 stuck by the ~~peach~~<sup>peach</sup>. (That would hurt)  
 the people that were coming to  
 see the ~~peach~~<sup>peach</sup> saw the ~~peach~~<sup>peach</sup>  
 coming. They ran like ~~stuck~~<sup>stuck</sup>. If that  
 were me I ~~would~~<sup>would</sup> be so ~~stuck~~<sup>stuck</sup>  
 I would ~~leave~~<sup>leave</sup> the ~~peach~~<sup>peach</sup> can  
 give a ~~chocolate~~<sup>chocolate</sup> factory, ~~which~~<sup>which</sup>  
 death the ~~city~~<sup>city</sup>. It was ~~lying~~<sup>lying</sup>  
 like a ~~racket~~<sup>racket</sup> into the ~~ocean~~<sup>ocean</sup>.  
 It went under the water for  
 five ~~seconds~~<sup>seconds</sup>. Now for your ~~pleasure~~<sup>pleasure</sup>.  
 1. No the ~~insects~~<sup>insects</sup> are not a family  
 they ~~live~~<sup>live</sup> all ~~up~~<sup>up</sup> there...  
 2. For now they all live ~~together~~<sup>together</sup> But  
 some ~~must~~<sup>must</sup> have English ~~together~~<sup>together</sup>  
 3. The ~~insects~~<sup>insects</sup> speak ~~together~~<sup>together</sup>.

Figure 17. Arden's proofreading process

Unlike many other children, Arden sees this attention to convention as being part of his role as a writer and he pursues it keenly and seriously. Snowball and Bolton (1999) write that:

*Proofreading is a spelling habit that all writers need to develop because the writing process involves so many things to think about that it is easy to make spelling mistakes while writing. Proofreading involves identifying words that may be misspelled and then attempting to correct the words, using resources to help if necessary. Children need to learn how to proof-read independently, even though you will continue to support them just as an editor would, because it is a skill they will use all through their lives (p. 203).*

It is one thing to know that we need to develop this in children but quite another to have them develop this discipline and the desire to do this themselves. I have Arden demonstrate his process for the class, not knowing what to expect. How does he decide which words to underline or circle? Where does he look when he is stuck? Arden mentions a few thoughts as the children view his writing from the overhead projector.

*"When I circled the word 'brock' [broke], I knew that it didn't look right- it looked more like the word broccoli, but I wanted to keep going. When I went back to it later, I thought of 'Coke' and thought it may be in the same word family. Some words, like insects, I knew I would find right in the book and so I looked them up. One of the things I notice when I read my writing back is that when I have trouble figuring out what a word is, I think to myself, 'Ms. Nishibata-Chan won't understand this, so I'd better fix it.' Sometimes, if it is a tough word, I go and get the class dictionary or check to see if it is already in my personal dictionary. Sometimes I just want to be done with my writing, but the more times I read over it, the more I see things that I know I could correct."*

I am impressed with how Arden is making an attempt to articulate the multiple strategies he uses when he looks over his writing. As Arden reads like a writer, he understands how it differs from other kinds of reading, such as reading for enjoyment or skimming for information. He uses his prior knowledge and draws upon the mini-lessons he has experienced to fine tune his own writing. Arden recognizes this piece of writing



has an audience and implies that he has a responsibility (even though it is easier to just leave it 'as is') to proofread and edit. As he is conversing with the other children, he demonstrates that learning about spelling is useful and that it is applicable to his every day writing. Everything that Arden says gives the impression that spelling is an integral part of his writing and his reading.

Finding ways to have children re-visit strategies or concepts as they come up in their writing is something I think is important. The more times they see an example in a different context, the more likely they are to remember it. As I write back to Arden in the following response, I am trying to help him notice another homophone in his writing. I like the way he replies to my question, explaining the meaning of 'chews' and 'choose' at the bottom of his response to my note.

I noticed that you did an edit  
on your piece. I have another homophone  
for you. Which one is used for  
what? choose → chews  
Ms. N-C

His Chews is Chewing on food.  
His Choose is go choose what  
you like.  
Thank you!

Figure 18. Homophone dialogue - Ms. N-C and Arden

This sense of on-goingness, of furthering conversations, of gently pushing the conversation is important to our community's learning. Our learning is not about isolated incidents, but about continuity, long-term gains and returning to critical conversations that require children to think about language as they write. While the WOW wall is a good way for me to keep track of these incidents, this places a high demand on me as a teacher. Yet, it is encouraging to see the children initiating similar kinds of connections with one another (as illustrated below) and to have them create more homophones to add to our list. We began to call these "double" WOW's as they illustrate someone else's

WOW in use. This transfer from learner to learner is exciting and adds a further dimension to the WOW wall.

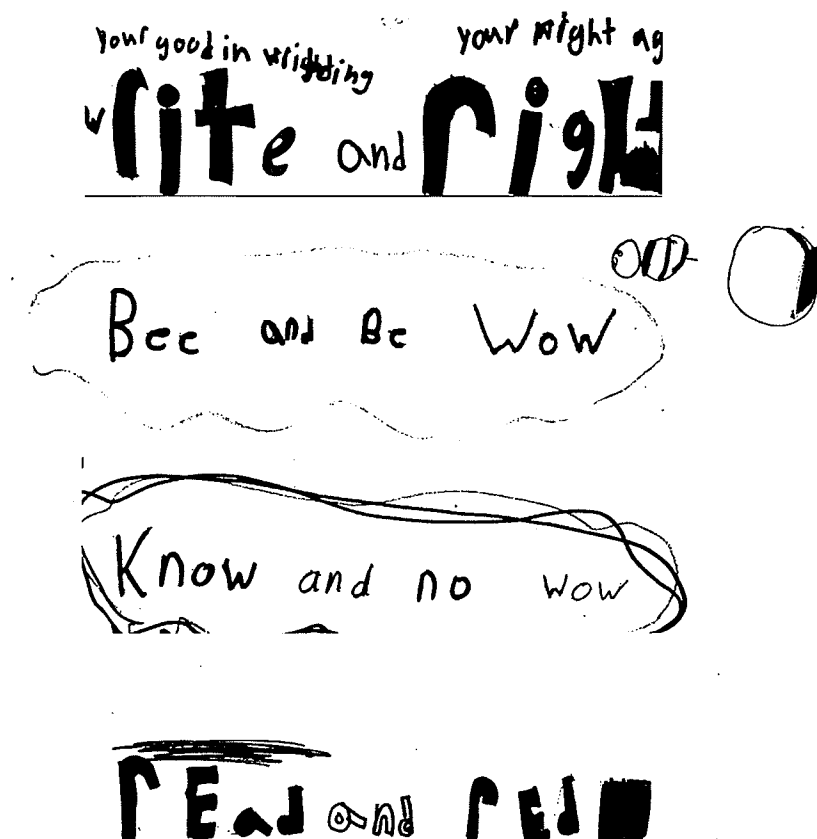


Figure 19. A "double" WOW

Many more mini-lessons and demonstrations grow out of what Arden's one writing example has presented. We are able to explore the idea of "reading like a writer" while acting as a community of inquirers. One idea builds upon the next idea, and there are endless invitations that both the children and I are able to create around important topics like homophones, proofreading and the role of applying their learning in specific situations. Children have always written about topics that are determined by their interests, but now they are approaching topics in language learning (spelling) research

that are also determined by their interests and their needs. The children develop this interest in language by sharing their anomalies. At the same time, they pique each other's interests as they publicly display their knowledge, as artifacts of their developing ideas, knowledge and shared plans. At this point in the inquiry cycle, the children's wonderings are driving our spelling curriculum and the children are depending on one another to think through their understandings. Not only are they taking ownership for their own spelling research artifacts, but they are also intricately involved in using what they have learned and pursuing this learning in whatever directions they see fit. The ongoing issues that arise from their writing provide the data from which our classroom inquiry thrives. Spelling, when looked at from this perspective, is not an add-on or an extra subject to teach, but rather, is an important part of the everyday work that we do.

## A Community of Inquirers: The Power of Developing a Thought Collective Around Spelling Strategies

*One of the things I have always marvelled at, when engaged in an inquiry with children is the way that each individual's question and discovery adds to a larger "thought collective", broadening our knowledge base. One cannot pursue an inquiry entirely alone but must draw upon the learning community, whether that be literature, experts, colleagues or our own life experiences (TNC Journal, 09/11/1999).*

The WOW wall takes on a life of its own and has us heading in directions I had never imagined. I am amazed at the way in which the children take responsibility for the learning posted on this wall, and challenge themselves to think in new, inventive ways about how to maximize its potential. The decision making process shifts from my asking questions such as, "What can I do to further this discussion and to maintain a momentum?" to "How can I support the children's discoveries and provide a working document for them to record all their interesting ideas?" I now trust that the children will have important writing lessons to teach and learn from one another. This lifts a huge burden from my shoulders. My responsibility becomes that of facilitator, establishing frameworks that support what they are excited to learn. This is not a lesser responsibility for me, but a change in my perspective. It requires me to live in the present, carefully observing and noticing *with* children, rather than looking back at things that children *have done* and finding examples that illustrate what I perceive as important. It also allows me to actively take part in and contribute to the discussions, rather than being the primary source of information and waiting for the children to take part in my agenda. This negotiated curriculum attends to both teacher and student agendas, with learning being the central goal of what we are trying to do together.

Using children's writing to demonstrate strategies is a powerful tool for learning (Snowball & Bolton, 1999; Bean & Bouffler, 1987) and can be effective when discussing spelling within a community of learners. My hope is that over time the results of teaching children spelling strategies will far outweigh the more common use of lists of words to be learned by memory. However, the key to strategy instruction is actually having children use a strategy effectively in their writing. Snowball and Bolton (1999) state that "competent spellers use many strategies to try unfamiliar words and to learn words" (p.13). If all spellers share strategies that are effective for them, this sets up an environment where the children will become communal resources for one another.

Up until now, our WOW wall has consisted of a column of significant words that have triggered the spelling discoveries we have collaboratively shared in our mini-lessons. Each of these cards brings us back to discussions we have had around language. Adjacent to this column of words are smaller cards, signifying the "double" WOW's or the application of someone's discovery in a classmate's writing, as with Arden's homophone lesson.

Jessica has a new example that she is keen to share; something she believes may be a strategy to help kids when they are writing. She refers to the "Have A Go" strategy, one that all the children are familiar with and are encouraged to implement on a regular basis. Jessica shares what she calls the 'vowel' strategy. She explains that some words are predictable and you can hear almost all of the sounds, like 'lets'. She says, "I know that there is an 'l', a 't' and a 's'. I can hear those letters. What I puzzle about is the vowel that belongs in the middle." Instead of writing out the whole word different times, like in a "Have A Go", she mentions that it has been helpful for her to draw a blank where she

knows the vowel belongs. She proceeds to say that she inserts all the vowels to see which one looks right. "When you see it, you know it, especially if it is a short word like that," Jessica states.



Figure 20. WOW wall strategy: Vowel insertion

Jessica suggests that this strategy can possibly help other children when they are spelling a word. We decide it would be useful to list potential STRATEGIES that children can draw upon in another column on our WOW wall.

In no time at all, the children begin displaying different strategies or resources they use while writing and proofreading. Some are commonplace, strategies like looking at your prior spelling of that word, looking in a book or a dictionary, searching around the room and noticing signs.

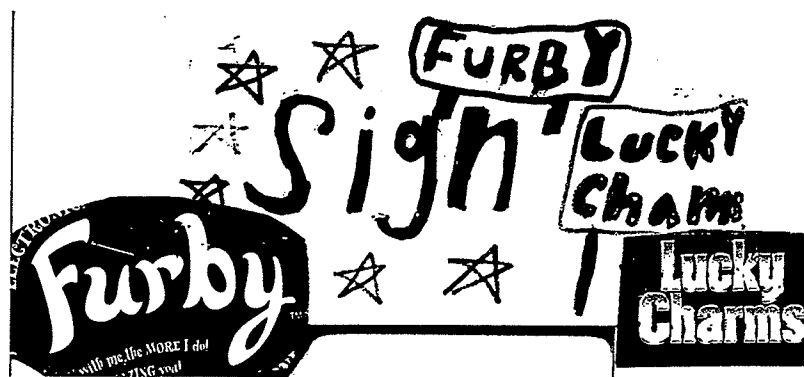


Figure 21. WOW wall strategy: Noticing signs

Others are personal strategies that individual children have found useful. These strategies are often specific to the challenges these children face in their own writing.

Benjamin shares the difficulty he has remembering lower case b's and d's in his writing. "I keep reversing them," he tells the group, "and this confuses me when I'm reading my writing back because it doesn't make sense and doesn't look right." He raises his hands above his head, in the air, using his thumb and pointer finger to form what looks like an L-shape and a backwards L-shape. "This is the bed strategy," he says. "My mom told me that whenever I'm unsure if I'm going to write a 'b' or a 'd', I should raise my hands like this, and remember that 'bed' begins with a 'b', so the circle faces to the right and 'bed' ends with a 'd', so the circle faces to the left." Some kids have heard this visual strategy before, some are configuring this with their hands and others are just soaking in the information, storing it away for a time where it might come in handy.




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Figure 22. "Bed" WOW

One suggested strategy is particularly inventive. Chris asks if anyone has ever heard the singing or chanting rhythm that goes with the word, 'Mi-ssi-ssi-ppi'. Many children have sung or said this either as a skipping game or have heard it on television. He proceeds to say that sometimes, with difficult words that are not spelled like they sound, he puts a tune to the word to help him remember its spelling. He gives us an example with the word 'because'. "The tricky part for me is the "-cau" part, so I say, "b - e - cau - s - e". He adds, "I picture it in my mind when I'm saying it." Chris uses both auditory and visual knowledge to help him spell words that do not necessarily follow an

expected pattern. He is moving beyond a phonetic strategy to spell (Wilde, 1992, p.24). Darren says this is similar to what he does when he wants to write a long word that has "a lot of rhythm to it". He says that he can clap out a word like 'Nishibata-Chan', listen for the beats and write them down. "It's kind of like listening to music and writing the notes down," he says. At this point, we talk about paying attention to the syllables in a word and how this can help with spelling. Children suggest tapping their finger or singing to the beat of a word to help break it into smaller parts. Chris and Darren are eager to write this down and add it to our WOW wall.




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Figure 23. WOW wall strategy: Tune or clapping

Any of these strategies on their own are useful, but of particular significance to me is the children's heightened interest when their classmates introduce a new idea or suggest a strategy to try. All of a sudden the strategy takes on a whole new meaning and has the children thinking hard about what they do when they spell. It also helps those children who may be struggling and encourages them to try something new and different. Beginning writers have a chance to shine and feel just as valued as those writers who already know how to spell conventionally. The children have a sense of power and leadership when sharing something that works well for them. With the WOW wall in place, the children's ideas are not only shared, but also marvelled at and celebrated. These positive attitudes and behaviours invite each child to contribute, regardless of his or her spelling ability. Each idea is greeted with the possibility that it may be of use to another writer at some point in time.



Working together as a community of inquirers, the children generate a resource that is much more powerful than just one person's thoughts and reflections. As they examine the range of strategies, try some of them out and see what works or what does not work for them, they are reconstructing their knowledge and making decisions that require them to engage differently in their language use. It is necessary for them to reflect on what they learn and to discern how they can use others' experiences to make new plans for themselves.

### **Being Resourceful and Reflective: Using the WOW Wall As An Editing Tool**

The organizational device that is central to our inquiry is simple, but accurately preserves the spelling and writing relationships we have been exploring. In my opinion, our wall helps us to redefine what it means to spell and illustrates the complexity of language that is often unstated. It takes a lot of thinking when learning how to spell and requires us to relate our personal understandings, our strategy knowledge, and others' language experiences, before we can apply what we have learned to our writing. Observing children integrating and internalizing all of this is fascinating work.

The children discover a further facet to the WOW wall, that takes us one step further on our spelling journey. The children are viewing their writing with a new set of eyes and are starting to become more aware of the differences between their roles as writer and as editor of a piece of work. They know editing and proofreading are processes we build into our writing routine and that both of these contribute to the quality of our publications. With more opportunities for conversation about their writing, they are coming to know the purposes for each in relation to both content and form. While I recognize the value of children engaging in peer editing, I am also aware of the amount of conventional knowledge and personal tact that it takes to approach a classmate about perceived mistakes. It requires knowledge about language, spelling and grammar. In addition, it requires patience, good listening skills, the ability to give and receive constructive comments, and a willingness to spend time looking at someone's work in order to help them learn. This is a tall order for a young child. Editing can, however, allow for critical reflection about one's work and can help children to identify what they

need help with as writers. Knowing that their work can be a teaching tool for others can be an empowering experience that not only allows them to build on another's strengths, but also requires that they provide and accept support from each other. I am not sure that every child is able to be a helpful proofreader, but I am convinced that all children need demonstrations that illustrate this process, whether it be for their own future use or for their work with others.

The children show interest in whole class edits and quickly pick up on mistakes their classmates make when we look at a piece of writing. When looking at their own work though, even with similar kinds of errors, the children often have difficulty making any notable changes. I find myself facing the same dilemma as a writer and know the challenge of looking at my own piece of writing with an objective eye. The children have had many opportunities to try editing in whole-class gatherings and small-group interactions, but never in a one-on-one situation. They indicate that they want to give editing a try, in a real setting, without the firsthand support of a teacher. I wonder if they will listen to one another and how they will try to help their partner improve his or her piece of writing. Because this inquiry is playing an important role in our literary lives in the classroom and impacts everything we do, I decide to take a risk and have a small group proceed with an authentic editing task that has each of them figuring out the correct spellings of someone else's work.

Cale and Amelia are writing to their pen pals from another school and are settling down to do a peer edit together before sending their letters off in the mail. They fill out a peer editing form that identifies the help they need and also requires them to reflect on the successfulness of their conference together. There is an additional element to this

peer editing sheet that asks them to draw upon the WOW wall and invites them to work together to apply their collective knowledge to their collaborative work as an editing team. While Cale is a youngest child and Amelia is an oldest child, it is a nice mentoring relationship, due to the different strengths both of these individuals bring to the writing process.

Peer Editing

Names: Amy  
Cale

Please remember:

1. Begin with something you like about a piece.
2. Suggest changes - be positive and helpful.
3. NO putdowns.

What I really want help with today:

I really want help with  
spelling.

Something Cale really helped me with today is:

Back wrote Ds and Bs.

WOW's	Double WOW's?
<u>when me and cale</u>	
<u>were reading cale</u>	
<u>skipped a word and</u>	
<u>said "I know about</u>	
<u>is right" He just wrote about</u>	
<u>with out me telling he anything.</u>	

Peer Editing

Names: Cale  
Amy

Please remember:

1. Begin with something you like about a piece.
2. Suggest changes - be positive and helpful.
3. NO putdowns.

What I really want help with today:

punctuation periods

Something Amy really helped me with today is:

Spelling and punctuation

WOW's	Double WOW's?

WOW's: When me and Cale were reading, Cale skipped a word and said, "I know 'about' is wrong." He just wrote 'about' without me telling him anything.

Figure 24. Peer editing form - Cale and Amy

This form requires the children to think carefully about what they are going to request help for and who they are going to approach for help. In order to do this, they must have an awareness of their classmates' strengths. They need to work together through the process, provide support, and do the best they can to move the writing towards a readable, comprehensive text for another child to read. While they are writing for another audience, I am not expecting huge changes or one hundred percent correctness, but rather, I hope they will make a few meaningful new connections and find

value in the process. My ultimate goal is to see children carefully working through a piece of writing, making mindful decisions, and valuing the help of another collaborator.

Below is Cale's edited letter, a transcription of a conversation he had with Amelia, as well as some of their jot notes when editing together.

Transcription with A. and C. editing their pieces together... Pen Pal letters - April 22, 1999

A ... 's trying to read C. 's piece out loud to him.  
A. is taking the lead with quite a lot of confidence in her voice.  
- Tape recorder is just placed on the table.

C: (He carries on) Going to be studying about Churchill.  
A period should be there, right?  
A: Going to be...  
C: Studying.  
A: Studiting...  
C: No, it's studying. a-b-o-u-t- I already see something I forgot!  
A: What?  
C: About.  
A: Yah, but I see something else that is wrong.  
C: Yah?  
A: Yah. But that doesn't matter.  
C: I'll just cross this out here, because I know how to spell it. A-B-O-U-T-  
A: Good! About. Spelling -I need to have a go! On the word studying. What did you have there?  
C: s-t-u-d-y-i-n-g  
A: I think that's close. Oh, I see something wrong. (She is having a go). Umm... okay... nevermind. (She says a short u sound) - /uh/, st-/uh/  
C: /a/?  
A: It's a vowel. /uh/  
C: u?  
A: Yes. We're going to do this.  
C: s-u-t  
A: No, you have it in the wrong order.  
C: I mean - s-t-a?  
A: Remember? /uh/, /uh/?  
C: U? S-t-u-

Figure 25. Cale's edit and transcription of conversation with Amelia

I am particularly impressed with Amelia's record keeping and the way that she leads Cale through his proofreading process, including the encouraging language she uses as they work through his piece of writing together. As shown in the transcription and on the paper she is using to work through spelling attempts (below), Amelia works with Cale to build from what he knows. Rather than simply telling him the correct answer, she gives him clues and tries to lead him towards what she knows is the right answer. They refer to the WOW board, make use of the "Have A Go" strategy and look back at the spelling words in their personal dictionaries to assist them with the words. I love Amelia's reflection celebrating Cale's self-correction of the word 'about':

*"When me and Cale were reading [she means proofreading/editing]*

*Cale skipped a word and said, "I know about is wrong." He just wrote 'about' without me telling him anything."*

The fact that Amelia places value on Cale's self-correction in front of her peers, encourages others to draw upon the spellings they know and transfer this into their writing. Cale explains how he reads his piece over twice before editing with Amelia and he still does not notice this error until he is reading his writing to her.

*"Amelia made me feel good about remembering this and it made me realize how important it is to not only have a helper to help you with things that may not look right, but to notice this YOURSELF. I won't ever forget the word 'about' again! For some reason, I looked at my writing in a different way when I was reading it to Amelia, because I knew we were trying to make changes together. It's a challenge... but I did it."*

By "changing his stance from that of a writer to that of a reader" (Bean and Bouffler, 1987, p.11), Cale's perception of spelling was altered.

An excerpt from Amelia's piece of writing illustrates one of the things that Cale helps her with, again, drawn from the WOW board. Cale brings Amelia to the WOW board and asks her to notice Benjamin's 'bed' strategy. "Do you notice somewhere in your writing that you could use Benjamin's strategy to help you?" Cale points out the sentence where the word 'lab' is written.

babysit the minacher black  
last I'm not shar if  
the minacher black last  
is a boy or girl. But  
the dogs name is KQ.

Figure 26. Amelia's writing

Amelia quickly strokes out the 'd', replacing it with a 'b' and thanks Cale for letting her find this herself.

As an editing team, Cale and Amelia make a lot of progress and have some valuable conversations along the way that facilitate their learning. This process of peer editing has them explaining their thinking to each other which requires greater clarity of thinking, than if they were just editing for themselves. They have a purposeful intent, in that they know someone else will be reading their letters after they have finished editing together. The WOW wall is integrated within their writing process and is an interactive tool for them, as proofreaders and as editors.

**Chapter 3:**  
**Digging Deeper: A Case Study of Timothy and**  
**Nathan**



### **The Exceptions: Pushing My Understanding of the Process Further**

As the WOW wall expands and spirals in interesting directions, a persistent but necessary inquiry is developing for me. It is ironic. There are elements of this classroom inquiry into spelling that are becoming much clearer, as I begin to learn how to support the children's spelling development in alternate ways and involve them in a process of creating and constructing meaning. I feel confident in the holistic way we are approaching spelling and believe we are evolving to a higher level of thinking and problem solving as a class. As I reflect on my own practice, I am gaining valuable insights that inform my teaching and require me to develop plans that draw upon the strengths and needs of the children.

There are a couple of children, though, who concern me and I wonder if this evolving curriculum is meeting their needs as spellers. I cannot ignore the fact that they continue to struggle with the process, need constant clarification, and are not making significant gains in their writing and spelling development. They are passive observers in conversations about language learning and are stuck in a place where they rely solely upon phonemic awareness and sound/symbol relationships when writing. Both children seem to sound out every single word. When I read the professional literature, it often talks about what good spellers do, but rarely does it suggest ideas or alternatives about how to assist those spellers who are struggling. This is becoming my new inquiry. I want to explore what I can do to challenge all children to be the best spellers they can be, without resorting to traditional approaches - which seemingly do not work anyway.

Timothy and Nathan are two children who resist being "boxed and arrowed" in a linear flowchart (Sirotnik, 1988). Perhaps this is partially why they intrigue me - they are like a mystery to be figured out. Both boys give me reason to look deeper into my practice, making it clear that there are no black and white answers. There are many grey areas. Their determination to learn and their magnetic charm invites me to further understand them as learners and challenges me to re-think my own beliefs, values and philosophy about how children learn.

I know I value both Timothy and Nathan as learners, invite their contributions and make every attempt to build upon their strengths. I recognize too, as Gentry (1993) states, that "learning to spell is a developmental process that takes considerable time and effort to complete" and that "students in the same grade, even at the same instructional reading level, differ widely in the present state of spelling development, and that these individual differences must drive the spelling curriculum" (p. 62). I wonder what more I can do to create a context for this to happen, when I already feel as if I have exhausted all possibilities.

I want to support Timothy and Nathan in ways that will leave their integrity intact, yet honestly acknowledge that they require more support than the other children with their spelling. Glimpses of my anxiety sometimes show up in our conversations together, as I feel frustration with their inability to recall spellings of commonly used words, of studied and learned spellings, and of mini-lessons we have had in the past week. Their misspellings surprise me. When I draw their attention to patterns I notice or strategies I feel they may have success with, they listen, nod their heads and make a correction. However, we seem to find ourselves in the exact same place the following week. My

observations of these two learners lead me to believe that I need to think about doing something different or change my way of working with them. How can I work with both children and provide evidence that they are progressing along a learning continuum that follows spelling as a developmental process?

This dilemma generates new questions for me as I think about developing a program or a series of connected experiences that specifically attend to these two learners' needs. The following questions cross my mind:

*How do we continually strive to work with all children, not just the ones who are firmly grasping and understanding what it is we are teaching? How do we find the fine balance between pushing and pulling, with the good intention of moving forward and yet respecting developmental processes that we know take time to achieve? How do we maintain a positive attitude towards learning, find ways children can be successful and yet pull them aside and work with them in a small group, acknowledging that they need extra supports? What kind of curriculum do we develop for these children, alongside of the curriculum we are creating as a class? (TNC Journal, ,05/13/1999)*

I feel a need to offer more explicit demonstrations and strategy lessons within the context of the reading and writing that Nathan and Timothy are doing. Bean and Bouffler (1997) write about the role of the teacher and the importance of demonstrating the interface between reading and writing:

*This means that as a teacher you have a very active role in structuring learning. You need to seek ways of ensuring that learning will take place by providing explicit modelling of the skills and processes you want your students to learn. Teaching strategies would include reading aloud and sharing reading with a focus on spelling, making charts for easy access to the demonstrations, modelling daily with explicit demonstrations such as joint construction of text. (p. 20)*

I have to figure out for myself what "having a very active role in structuring learning" looks like with Timothy and Nathan, especially when I think that I am already

doing this with the larger group. How much more explicit can I be? What supports are actually supportive for children who are struggling spellers?

I invite Timothy and Nathan to meet with me twice a week, in the mornings before school begins, for the few weeks that are left in the school year. They are willing and eager to gather for this early bird meeting twice a week, and wonder when it will commence. This is how our Breakfast Club begins.

## **The Breakfast Club: Initial Reflections**

I envision our mornings together as a quiet and reflective time where I can support Timothy and Nathan in pulling their ideas together, in listening to their understandings, in figuring out what they currently know, and in allowing them to raise questions that attend to their needs. I want to provide a welcoming and comfortable ambiance, as this short, but sacred time before school begins, must be a place where all three of us can think and reflect upon spelling as we engage in a learning process together. I think back to why I have identified both of these young learners as members of our community who need some extra time and assistance.

Timothy, over the two years he has been with me, broadens my perspective about teaching. He is an excellent storyteller who writes with such detail and passion, yet his spelling errors often distract me, as a reader, from his overall message. His thoughts run faster than his hand can go. He has yet to grasp the idea of punctuating a sentence - where to put the period or the question mark - at least on his own. Interestingly enough, he makes his own generalizations, such as, "I've figured it out - periods come before the word, 'I'". I am not sure whether he generalizes this from the sentences that he writes or because the letter 'I' is always a capital letter. Nonetheless, Tim is a pretty complex thinker. Simple things are not always easy for Tim and he does not always make the same connections that others do. Yet, ask him about the elements of a legend in a story he writes or about the workings behind a lego structure he builds and he will give a detailed and thorough answer.

Nathan, on the other hand, is just beginning to believe in himself as a writer, and writing now piques his interest. He has been a reluctant writer up until this year. He is

writing what he can, rather than asking, "How much should I write?" For the longest time, perfection was really important to him when he wrote, but he is now taking more risks. He is sensitive to constructive comments and will quickly erase his work if asked to edit it. I worry about his spelling since there does not seem to be any pattern, strategy or reliable resource that he consistently uses, even though I will initiate discussions and ask him about these. As his teacher, it is often difficult to determine where the fine line exists between encouraging and supporting him. If I push too hard, he is discouraged and shuts down. If I do not push at all, he perceives that there are few expectations and seems not to care. It takes careful listening to know when to withdraw and when to allow him to be independent. Nathan seems to think that spelling only involves memorization, and when I ask him about some of his words (from his writing), he quickly says, "I don't have a very good memory... what was it again?" For Nathan, spelling is a "talent" - you are either good at it or not. I want to change this way of thinking and empower him to believe in himself as a writer and speller, but also give him effective strategies to use when reflecting upon his spelling.

While Timothy and Nathan are not similar as writers, they both raise perplexing questions for me and continue to push my thinking. Spelling, and more generally, writing conventions, are hard for these boys. Deep inside, I know that their spelling is below grade level, and while they are always trying their best, I wonder if I have indirectly and unintentionally given them the message that spelling is not as important as the message/content that they are writing. I also know that I cannot control what they learn and do not believe that memorization is solely the key to their learning. At this point, it would be easy to turn to a spelling textbook, but I know this is not what they

need. I feel a sense of responsibility to these two learners and keep asking myself if the writing instruction we are engaging in is meeting their needs. How can I help them care more about their spelling, without placing unnecessary pressure on them to make improvements?

We begin our first meeting by discussing the intention of Breakfast Club, and I explain how I hope we can share our journey as learners investigating what we do as spellers when we are writing. We only have a short time together, but it is evident that they are eager to begin. I want to try to understand the kinds of processes they are going through (or not) and to gain insight into the strategies they draw upon when writing, so I have adapted a spelling survey from Regie Routman (1991).

## Spelling Survey

Name                      Date March 25

1. Are you or are you not a good speller? Why do you think so?

I think I am a good sales because my fitting have increase a lot from last time, and all this now I speak more and it <sup>9</sup>ever

I think I am a good speller because my writing has improved a lot from last term and also now I spell more and it is easier to write.

2. What do you do when you don't know how to spell a word?

I try to send it out. I ~~drop the balls~~ I put  
put a rather wide trail of I ball in the distance.

I try to sound it out. I clap the syllables. I might put another word there or I look in the dictionary. (\*When asked what he means by "put another word there, he says, "If I have trouble with the 1st word and there is another word to describe it and I know how to spell the other one, I use the other one. Like, instead of 'father', I might use 'dad'.\*)

3. If someone is having trouble spelling a word, how could you help that person?

I say put a roth whole there.  
maybe try to send it out and if it is a fire  
for word look in the dictionary.

I say put another word there. Maybe try to sound it out and if there is a really tough word, look in the dictionary.

4. What three things help you learn to spell a new word?

a. At first I find it hard to split.

## Spelling Survey

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date Dec 25 / 1978

3. Are you or are you not a good speller? Why do you think so?

I think that I am a good Spanish cat I look for people and when I see them I look at them and they don't

I think that I am a good speller 'cuz I look for periods and watch for neatness and look for a word that doesn't sound right.

2. What do you do when you don't know how to spell a word?

I look in my <sup>PHONIC</sup> dictionary for the word.  
and fit the word bowl and take it home to  
phonetic and look in books or notebook

I look in my personal dictionary for the word and write the word down and take it home to practice it and look in books or my notebook (writer's notebook).

3. If someone is having trouble spelling a word, how could you help that person?

by talking them to Sarah: it cuts and ask them of what Sarah of wilds do you her and to least them bit of how that think it is and then close them

By telling them to sound it out and ask them, "What sound of words do you hear?" and to let them write how they think it is and then choose one of them.

4. What three things help you learn to spell a new word?

a. fitting the old world and to King's name  
b. taking in my <sup>own</sup> wisdom  
c. and in my fitting old

- a. At first I try really hard to spell it.
- b. I split the word up.

5. What things have you tried that do not help your spelling?

- a. I look in my notebook
- b. I look in poems
- c. \_\_\_\_\_

- a. I look in my notebook.
- b. I look in poems.

- a. Writing the word down and taking it home
- b. Looking in my personal dictionary and in my writing folder

5. What things have you tried that do not help your spelling?

- a. the big Dictionary did not help me
- b. and rhyming it doesn't work either
- c. and the A-B-C charts

- a. The big dictionary does not help me
- b. Rhyming it doesn't work either.
- c. The A-B-C charts

In writing it makes me feel good and proud  
and like a famous author when I get made to  
tell myself that others talk time and  
then I feel better

Other comments: In writing, it makes me feel good and proud and like a famous author. When I get mad I tell myself that authors take time and then I feel better.

Figure 27. Spelling survey - Nathan and Timothy

Both learners perceive themselves to be good spellers and their answers suggest an overall confidence in the strategies they use and the limited resources they draw upon. They refer to their frequent use of the 'sounding out' strategy, allude to the importance of practicing their words, and recognize that looking in the dictionary can be a useful tool, but have difficulty knowing where to begin. There seems to be some confusion about what makes a good speller since their definition seems to encompass punctuation, neatness and effort. Both show an interest in their writing, but are not as keen to spend time figuring things out. When drawing upon prior knowledge and mini-lessons that we have recently experienced, they have difficulty remembering details. They have limited knowledge about how to store and retrieve visual word forms, yet they indicate that they are using visual strategies, such as "Have A Go", searching out classroom books and using the dictionary. Both have the desire to add to the WOW wall in significant ways, but their strategies and understandings limit them from making a meaningful contribution.



We end our first session together by talking about their surveys and we develop a plan for our next meeting. Between now and then I suggest we choose a book that they are both interested in reading together and looking at in more depth. This initial experience has me thinking about the context we can create for authentic reading and writing connections to take place, which could lead us towards looking at the mechanical and visual aspect of language from a writer's perspective.

I, too, reflect upon their spelling surveys, sprawl samples of their current writing over the table, and use my observations to develop some beginning goals that I want to achieve together during Breakfast Club:

- Self-confidence - I want to maintain their positive attitude, build confidence in what they can do, and have them feel encouraged by the progress they are making. This will continue to promote risk-taking and will allow me to see what strategies they are drawing upon when writing.

- Spelling is linked to reading and writing. The more we read, the more we are apt to develop a greater sense of visual awareness and perhaps transfer this to our writing.

Snowball and Bolton (1999) say that "children need to realize that they can learn about spelling by studying what other authors do in published writing and to continually reflect on how the strategies they are learning can help them with their own writing" (p. 10).

The research indicates that, while spelling and reading differ, they are obviously related to one another (Wilde, 1992). Through this process, I would hope that they may develop a heightened awareness for visual details or a sense of what "looks" right.

- Add spelling strategies to their limited repertoire. I would like Timothy and Nathan to see connections between words and to use words to help them spell other words. While

we have done this as a large group, I envision us connecting this to their reading, involving them in some element of choice. I would also like to involve them in writing in which they have a need to implement strategies when deciding how to spell a word. I notice particular difficulties with short and long vowels in their writing and would like to find ways to incorporate this into our mini-lessons.

- To see this as an extension of what we're pursuing as a class around spelling. My hope is to have both learners make contributions to the larger community of learners and share what they are learning. I believe that other children can learn from Timothy and Nathan's experience and that this will give them an opportunity to share what they are working on during our morning meetings.

The goals I have are broad, but consistent with the way that we, as a class, are learning about spelling. I anticipate our instruction being more direct and individualized, with only two children informing this curriculum. Part of the challenge of this inquiry for me will be to develop this curriculum as we go along, rather than creating a framework well in advance. While I have a plan for how and what I would like the children to learn, I will have to use my observations on the spot, highlighting aspects of language and contextualizing spelling within the reading and writing that we are doing. This learning-centered instruction drives my teaching and my understandings of how children learn guides the instructional decisions that I make. This initiating experience allows for some insight into each child, as a speller, and allows some thinking time for me to find potential resources upon which to build. The context for the curriculum engagements that I will plan for Timothy and Nathan is based on their current needs and allows me to be responsive to their present understandings. It gives us a place to start.

## Strategy Lessons: Using Authors To Teach Us About Language

Our teaching and learning journey go hand in hand, but it seems that the further we pursue this inquiry into spelling, the more I am aware of the cyclical nature of the process playing itself out in our daily lives. My own inquiry parallels our process as a class and now closely resembles the morning meeting ritual that is developing with Timothy and Nathan. We are exploring different ideas and looking into various issues, but it is evident that one topic builds upon another, creating this constantly changing study that is stimulating and involving. We come back to the same inquiry cycle again and again but each time we bring diverse experiences and new knowledge.

As I anticipate and plan for our next Breakfast Club meeting, I gather a couple of texts that I will suggest we explore together - ones that are humorous and lyrical, have playful language, have potential for a study of rhyming word patterns and that allow us to look at an author's style. Three copies of the following books are laid out on a table: Oh, the Places You'll Go! and Hooray for Diffendoofer Day! by Dr. Seuss, Something Big Has Been Here by Jack Prelutsky and The Giraffe, The Pelly and Me by Roald Dahl. All seem to meet my criteria and are books that I think that Timothy and Nathan will enjoy.

I have a tentative framework in my mind, one that gives me a direction from which to begin no matter which book the boys choose. Nathan and Timothy both have a sense of humour and especially enjoy reading books with a good story and that are fun and light-hearted. With books such as these, they seem to notice content details and can repeat key phrases, capturing the essence of the story. My hope is to have them try to "read like writers" during our shared reading experience, locating features of rhyming words that will help them to develop an idea of spelling patterns, since this is a challenge

for the two of them. I hope to engage them in discussion about how words may sound the same but may be spelled differently. I would like to lead them to look at print details and raise their awareness of the visual aspect of spelling and the structure of words.

These plans are based on my present observations and what I see as needs for these two learners. It sounds like an ideal lesson plan, but truthfully, I have no idea how this will play out because I want Tim and Nathan to have an element of choice in selecting the materials they want to read; I want to listen and see where they are at as spellers and build upon this kidwatching. I truly want them to see this as an inquiry into language that we are engaging in together. This is the inquiry that I will be engaged in.

The minute both children walk into the room and see the display of book choices, it is evident that they are drawn to their favorite author, Roald Dahl and the book, The Giraffe, the Pelly and Me. Unbeknownst to me, both have already read this book and Timothy immediately starts singing a tune to the poem in the book. This is the book they want to pursue further. My immediate reaction is to re-direct them and to try to introduce a new author who is similar to Roald Dahl. As I begin to open my mouth, I stop myself, realizing that a choice ought to be a choice. There is an advantage of knowing the style of writing that Roald Dahl is so well known for and of being familiar with a book. This will allow us to focus on the language and visual details within the story, rather than getting carried away with the content alone.

I refer to the conversations we have had as a class about the connection between reading, writing and spelling. Both Nathan and Timothy recognize that the visual aspect of spelling is difficult for them:

*T: Remember when we talked about reading and writing and how it was connected to spelling?*

*N: Yes, we said the more we read, the better we are at writing!*

*T: Why do you think that is?*

*N: Because there are lots of words that are, like tough for me and I need to use them in my printing.*

*Ti: Or the spelling words that I have a hard time with - when you see them, then you can remember them and write them down. Remember, you said that we can do that in our mind's eye?*

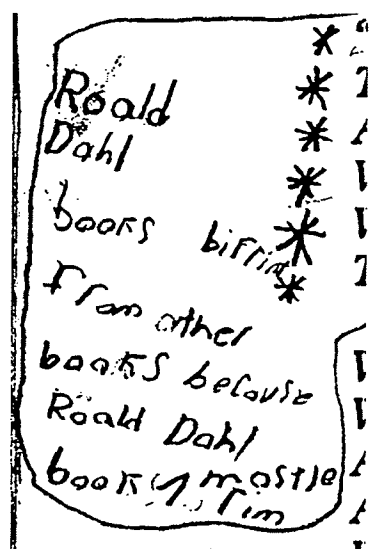
*N: It's hard to remember all the words that you read, though.*

*Ti: Well, if you have a spelling word that you have a tough time on and you're reading a book (he looks at the book in his hand), like, let's say the word was... giraffe. And then you're reading it and I say to myself, "Oh, it's g-i-r-a-f-f-e." I can try and picture it in my mind and try and write the word.*

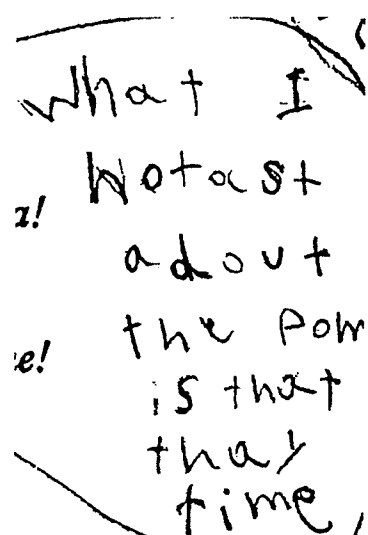
*T: Oh, yes, that's like that strategy we talked about called, "Look, Say, Name, Cover, Write, Check" strategy (Snowball & Bolton, 1999).*

*Ti: Yes, kind of, but it is my own version.*

Timothy does draw upon a strategy that we have talked about as a class, though I am not sure he utilizes this when he is writing. We talk about reading like writers. I ask them to notice what Roald Dahl does as a writer and to identify what is interesting to them from a writing perspective. As they work from a photocopy of the chapter, I want them to think about what we can learn about the words and language and to underline or circle what interests them, so that we can talk about it later. They begin to silently read to themselves and make comments along the way. At one point, Nathan says, "You know what? It is amazing that words tell you something, but really, it is the whole poem that really tells you something!" The meaning is remaining central to his understanding and yet he is looking at language in a different way. He marks something down in the margin.



Roald Dahl books differ from other books because  
Roald Dahl books mostly rhyme.



What I noticed about the poem is that they  
rhyme.

Figure 28. Comments about Roald Dahl's style - Nathan and Timothy

Both Timothy and Nathan have written about the **rhyming** in Roald Dahl's writing and begin talking about how this makes it interesting for them, as readers, to read. They compare this book to other Roald Dahl books, noting that you have to pay close attention to understand what this story is about because it is in rhyme. I begin to think out loud about how we can figure out ways to spell a word by knowing a similar word. I ask them to circle words that rhyme in the same colour of pencil crayon, so we can compare which endings are the same and which ones sound the same but look different. This is what they come up with.

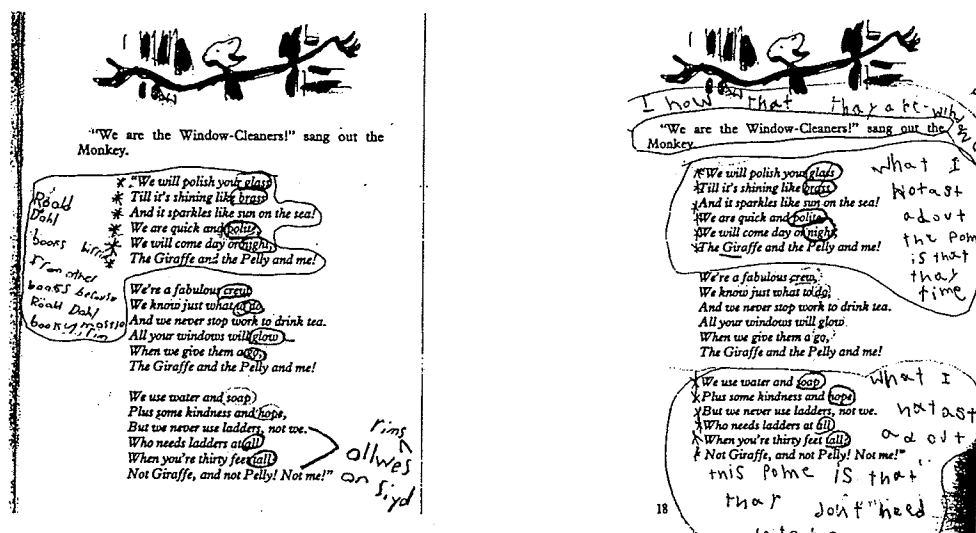


Figure 29. Rhyming patterns - Nathan and Timothy

They can obviously identify rhyming words. Since our time for today is coming to a close, I ask them to choose a rhyming pattern that they find most interesting. Tim chooses 'glass' and 'brass' and Nathan chooses 'soap' and 'hope'. We talk about "onset" - the part of the syllable before the first vowel - and "rime" - the part of the syllable from the first vowel onwards - (Goswami & Bryant, 1990 as cited in Moustafa, 1998, p.8) in the words they have chosen.

Nathan notices that his words rhyme, but their ending is different. He is going to do a word search while he is reading to look for -oap and -ope endings to see what kind of list he can generate. I have a challenge for Nathan as well.

*T: What makes the 'o' in hope, a long 'o' sound?*

*C: You mean, like the way it says its name?*

*T: Yes. What is the same and what is different between hope and hop, in the way that the word is made up?*

*C: Hope has an 'e' and hop does not, it is like hopping on one foot.*

*T: Aha! A silent e that makes the 'o' say its name. I'm wondering how many words you can generate that have the rime 'op' and the rime 'ope'?*

He is excited to begin this search and I am pleased that I am able to fit in a rule

that shows up a lot in his writing - his omission of the silent e.

Long <u>o</u> (says its name)		
soap	hope	hop
toad	Envelope	hot
toast	rope	top
coach	home	stop
coach	cone	not
boat	hose	drop
load	nose	lot
goat	close	pop
lead	toe	top
	more	map
	pose	plap
	rose	not

Figure 30. Long o search - Nathan

Timothy chooses a spelling pattern that is the same. In Timothy's choice of 'glass' and 'brass', we talk about the short 'a' sound in both of his rhyming words. Timothy's challenge for our next meeting together is to jot down any other words that have a short 'a' vowel, either in his reading or just words that he knows. Timothy also notices the double consonant at the end of the words, glass and brass and wants to see if he can think of other words that end with a double consonant as well. He quickly turns to the page where a story character's name (Mr. Gregg) is and writes it down on his list.



a Short vowel	
glass	brass
Short vowel	double consonant
Post	Mr. Grc. ss
ass	class
Magic	Guess
After	Will
	and
	Well

Figure 31. Short 'a' and double consonant endings - Timothy

"Reading like a writer" affords us the opportunity to talk about language and to engage in a focused word study. Both of these learners need a program that is interesting, but which can also be individualized and accommodate their unique needs. When they have an investment in their work and care about it, they are able to point out an author's technique and take the time to attend to spelling patterns that are of interest to them. Finding opportunities that are relevant and give them choices, while still meeting their learning needs, is my role as I facilitate this conversation. Their writing needs to be fresh in my memory so that I can capitalize upon what I know they need to work on, as well as what is worth spending time on, in the larger language learning context. Observing spelling in a reading context also provides a safety net for both these boys because they are looking at someone else's writing, not their own, so there is a comfortable distance from the text itself. They are empowered by their ability to recognize spelling patterns and have success finding other words that meet the same criteria.

There is an immense time commitment when engaging in a spelling exploration that is individualized and personally meaningful, like this one is. For this inquiry, I feel the time spent is well worth it. I hope that with more experience, our subsequent sessions

will go more quickly and we will be able to spend time highlighting other spelling strategies. Learning takes time and I realize that there is not a single best method that works for all children. My concern about how the curriculum will unfold and how I will utilize their conversation and turn it into a mini-lesson is an unnecessary worry, given the fact that I know Timothy and Nathan quite well as writers. They both look forward to meeting again and I honestly share their enthusiasm. I wonder how these investigations will lead us toward forming a relationship between spelling and the reading and writing experiences across the curriculum in which they are engaged on a daily basis.

## What is a Vowel?: New Insights

For a number of weeks, Timothy, Nathan and I have been exploring spelling patterns and grouping words according to their pronunciation, based on The Giraffe, The Pelly and Me. While our time together is limited, it pleases me to see that both boys are becoming "strategic, rather than rote learners" (Short, Harste, Burke, 1996, p. 141). We are trying to de-emphasize memorization by highlighting similarities and differences in orthographic features we examine. This means that "unlike direct instruction, insights and discussion evolve from language in use, rather than from a predetermined skill sequence. Strategies are not formulas or rules to be applied, but options that can be used to construct meaning so that students develop a repertoire of strategies" (p.142). While the strategy lessons themselves have value, I am just as impressed with Timothy and Nathan's growing capacity to articulate what they are doing and thinking. In doing this, they are gaining confidence in themselves as learners and are developing their voices - voices that reflect their growing understandings.

Timothy and Nathan are just finishing a letter home to their parents, telling them about their week. They have decided, prior to this breakfast session, to look at each other's letters and do a quick edit, pointing out one or two things they notice about their spelling. This is the first time they have taken the initiative to edit for someone else and they confide that they may need a little help from me. We have talked a lot about developing an awareness for the visual aspects of words while they are reading. Together we have been noticing what words look like and have been drawing upon these small details in our writing. I worry that this may be beyond their current capabilities and I wonder if this may set them up for a frustrating experience. On the other hand, I am

delighted to see that they want to take ownership for this process and demonstrate the confidence to share their unedited work in such a public way.

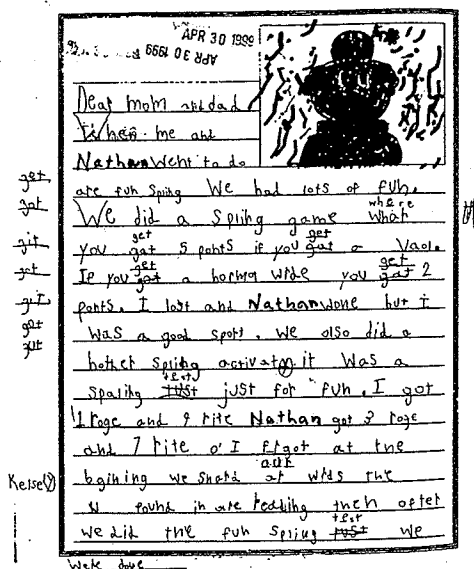


Figure 32. Timothy's edit

Timothy offers to read his piece first. The content of his letter is interesting because it relates to our shared time together:

Dear Mom and Dad,  
When me and Nathan went to do our "fun" spelling, we had lots of fun. We did a spelling game where you get 5 points if you get a vowel. If you get a normal word you get 2 points. I lost and Nathan won, but I was a good sport. We also did another spelling activity. It was a spelling test, just for fun. I got 1 wrong and 9 right. Nathan got 3 wrong and 7 right. Oh, I forgot. At the beginning we shared our words that we found in our reading, then after we did the fun spelling test we were done.

Love, Timothy

Nathan has his finger on the word 'get', spelled 'g-a-t' by Timothy.

"Look at the vowel in that word, Timothy. Do you notice anything wrong?"

Timothy looks confused. "Which letter is the vowel?" he says.

I interject here and ask both boys, "What are the vowels?" They get a piece of paper and Timothy proceeds to write the letters down, 'a', 'o', 'u', 'i' and then stops. He is unsure about the rest. Nathan recites the other two vowels and Timothy writes them

down. He acts surprised. This is new knowledge for him. This is new knowledge for me. I have no idea that he does not know all of the vowels. Perhaps this explains why he has such difficulties with short and long vowels in his writing. Timothy has written something on the same piece of paper and marks it with an asterisk. He reads it out loud to us, "Every word needs a vowel."

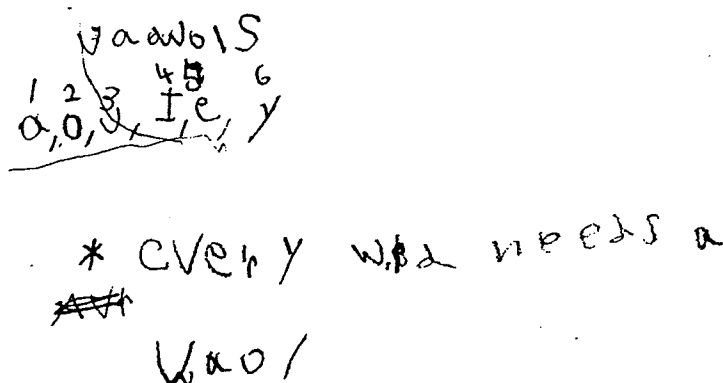


Figure 33. "Every word needs a vowel." - Timothy

He points out all of the words he has written in his letter to that point, proving that indeed his generalization is correct. Nathan is now amazed. He looks to his writing to see if it is true. He confirms Timothy's hypothesis.

Nathan draws Timothy back to the word 'get' and signals to him that the 'g' is correct and the 't' is correct. Timothy proclaims, "I have an idea." He scuttles over to the WOW wall and points to Jessica's "Have A Go" strategy, when she inserts the vowels in-between the 'l' and the 't'. He writes this out at the side of his paper and points to the correct spelling. "This one looks right to me," he says.

get  
 got  
 git  
 get  
 git  
 get  
 got

---

Figure 34. "Have A Go" - replacing the vowels - Timothy

Nathan celebrates his accomplishment and praises him for referring to the WOW wall.

Timothy says, under his breath, "Now I finally get what Jessica was doing."

They continue to edit together and Nathan points out the word 'test', indicating that the vowel is incorrect again. Timothy proceeds to go through the same process as he did with the word 'get', and again gets it correct. Nathan also points out that "something is missing" at the end of the word 'activity' and makes an analogy to his sister's name, Kelsey. We have looked at our classmates' names many times at the beginning of the year, so Timothy easily makes this connection. They look to their personal dictionaries to find the word 'our'.

While it may not look like they have done a lot of editing, a lot of learning has happened for both of these boys. In fact, there is significant growth in their expertise with spelling conventions. This process is stress free, relaxed and there is a sense of camaraderie between the boys as they work together. Not only is there a purpose to this edit, but both children gain a sense of control and are responsible to each other, as they exchange ideas, back and forth. They engage in a conversation about the conventions of writing and are each other's best audience. Nathan has the opportunity to point out what does not appear to look right and has the advantage of sharing his expertise, drawing

upon what he knows. He teaches Timothy some important lessons - what the vowels are, how an 'e' sound at the end of a word can be a 'y' and what a short 'e' sounds like.

Timothy also feels empowered as a learner as he teaches Nathan that there is a vowel in each word. He finally makes a connection to the WOW wall, using one of the strategies to figure out the spelling of the words 'get' and 'test'. Both children are building a trusting relationship as they work through this process together, and both feel a sense of pride when sharing their experience with the class.

What I have learned as their teacher, is the tremendous sense of confidence and trust that is established when children have the opportunity to be both a teacher and learner. My intentions were to minimize the risk and set up a situation where I knew the boys could feel success and come up with solutions together as they worked through this edit. Both had never really engaged in a peer edit, probably because I did not feel as if they were at a place in their writing where they could do this successfully for another child. Yet, in this small group situation, they were fully engaged and taught me about the strategies they draw upon when spelling. I think they knew more than they thought they knew and certainly knew more than I gave them credit for knowing. In the end, I believe that both boys left feeling more confident and comfortable with the process. I, too, felt as if I could let go of some control and allow the children to edit at whatever level they are at. I realized I could turn this over to both Timothy and Nathan, and that they would rise to the challenge. At the same time, I could still play a role supporting their learning in a positive way.

I am also reminded that children make connections to prior experiences when they are meaningful for them. While I initially saw both learners as "passive observers" when

we engaged in whole class mini-lessons, I am now struck by the way that Timothy is able to draw upon a classmate's strategy when he has the need to use it and he understands the usefulness of this strategy. It works for him. When he does not have the knowledge of what a vowel is, he can not make the strategy make sense for him. He is not a passive observer, but shelves the strategy until it is needed. My assumption that learning is not happening is incorrect. The transfer of learning from one situation to another may not happen at that moment or in the immediate future, but when a connection is made it can be understood at a later date. Learning can and will happen, with or without the teacher present and overhearing a conversation. This is an important and insightful lesson for me to learn.



**Taking A Lot of Slow to Grow:  
Shifting The Way We Think About Our Work**

Hurry, scurry,  
Worry, flurry  
There go the grown-ups  
To the office, to the store  
Subway crush, traffic rush  
No wonder  
Grown-ups  
Don't grow up anymore  
It takes  
a lot  
of slow  
to grow.  
-Eve Merriam

Inquiry needs to be thorough and well thought through; where we take the time to see the world in new ways. It is not about pushing children through curriculum or pressuring children to keep up with a fast-paced world. It requires a willingness to stop, look, listen and reflect before planning new learning endeavors. This poem is a gentle reminder of what kind of grown-up I want to refrain from being - one who is swept away by the rushed and hurriedness of today's society. If I want to create a classroom that is a peaceful haven and respects every child's pace, I need to remember that "it takes a lot of slow to grow". But this is easier said than done, as I often feel that I never have enough time to spend with each child. How much is enough? As much as I want to individualize instruction, I also know that I need to allow time for the children to process their understandings, I need to respect each child's developmental readiness, and to give them opportunities to practice what they know in authentic ways. This takes time and the benefits do not necessarily show right away.

The time that Nathan, Timothy and I spend together is productive, successful and attempts to address their learning needs. We have a long road ahead of us, but I celebrate where they are heading and believe our time together has made a difference. Our writing community reads like writers, writes like writers, talks like writers, thinks like writers and collaborates like writers. Both boys are now fully engaged in this process and are becoming increasingly aware of what the writing process entails. They are now inclusive members of this learning community's endeavours. It has been my goal to introduce and integrate their voices into our whole class discussions, through specific interventions rather than through more of the same of what we have been doing. This series of lessons or program, per se, is tailored to their specific needs. Timothy and Nathan are developing new language to talk about their writing - language that looks critically, yet thoughtfully, at what they are doing. This rehearsal time with one another has helped them to articulate their learning to their peers in a coherent manner and has actively involved them in our discussions.

I look back at their writing, prior to Breakfast Club, and compare it to recent pieces of writing they have been working on:

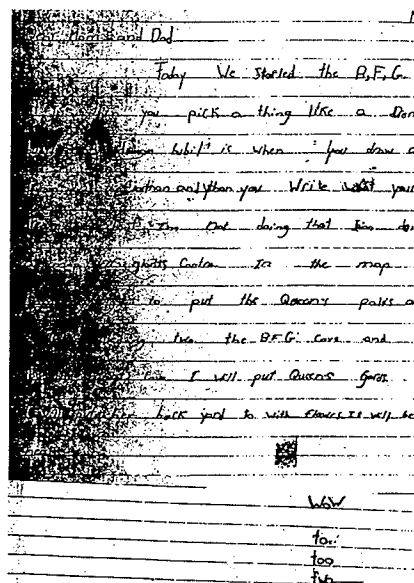
Dear mom and dad at gym  
 When we enter the door, the play  
 structure was up. yay yay yay yay.  
 I said.

Dear Mom and Dad, At gym, when we entered the door, the play structure was up. "Yay, yay, yay, yay," I shouted. (Nathan)

---

Figure 35. Early writing sample - Nathan





Dear Mom and Dad,

Today we started the B.F.G. It is when you pick a thing like a dream bubble. A dream bubble is when you draw a dream in the jar and then you write what your dream is about. I'm not doing that, I am doing a map of Giant Country. In the map I am going to put the Queen's Palace and two rocks leading to the BFG cave and the bad giant's cave. I will put the Queen's guards. I will put her backyard with flowers. It will be neat.

Figure 37. Later writing sample - Nathan

I like the way that Nathan has drawn a line under the words that he knows he can go back to in the book, The BFG, to look up. He does not let this disrupt his writing process. Many commonly used words are also accurately spelled and his vowel usage is more conventional. His words are closer approximations to the conventional spellings. He remembers the WOW wall and footnotes to, too and two as a reference at the bottom of his page.

Once a long time ways a way deep in  
 the Arctic there was a village. And  
 there was a very special person and his  
 name was... Raven. You may be thinking  
 a bird is what special but Raven was a  
 wise bird. People thought of him as a god  
 just because he was magical but he wasn't a God, he was just a bird, but he did not  
 know that yet.

Once upon a time ways away, deep in the Arctic, there was a village. There was a very special person and his name was... Raven. You may be thinking, "A bird isn't special," but Raven was a wise bird. People thought of him as a God just because he was magical but he wasn't a God, he was just a bird, but he did not know that yet.

Figure 38. Later writing sample - Timothy

In Timothy's piece, the element of story remains strong (in legend tradition) and he moves towards standard spelling in a much more deliberate and visual way. He edits independently before coming for a conference and uses a vowel chart as a resource. He does use vowels to placehold his spelling attempts, even if they are not always the correct ones. Timothy knows that vowels are challenging for him. He also consults with me, asking me in certain instances, if his vowel is correct. He follows my strategy by checking off the letters about which he is uncertain and underlines the letters about which he is not confident. This is not an arduous task for Timothy, but one that he is accustomed to doing. Increasingly, this takes much less time and is much less stressful than before. As he says, "It is just what writers do. I know that now."

My explicit spelling instruction with Timothy and Nathan includes a combination of strategy lessons, spelling pattern observation, games intended to develop interest in language, and the close examination of the construction of words, especially within their reading and writing. I notice they are moving from primarily sounding out words to

paying attention to other features, including what the words look like. As I watch them write, they are not deliberating over and inventing every single word; there is some automaticity. There is growth. It is hard to pinpoint what specifically helps them to improve their spelling or if the growth I see is more an indication of their natural maturation as writers, however I am most interested in their efforts to try to apply some of this knowledge to their everyday writing.

While we have no perfect measuring stick with which to evaluate their growth, we have preserved and gathered evidence about the learning that is happening and have regularly shared this with their parents. Nathan's mom mentions that the opportunity to talk about the Breakfast Club experience has opened up new conversations about language at home. Nathan is eager to teach and talk about what he knows. He tries to help his younger sister talk through her process and they converse about the strategies they both use. Timothy's family is interested in hearing about the connections we are making as readers and engage in a similar task as a family when they read-aloud every evening together. His parents share some of their writing, pertaining to their jobs, and share their process of proofreading and editing their work before it becomes a final report. Both families have found new ways to be involved in their child's education, incorporating these practices into their daily lives as families.

As the school year is coming to an end and Breakfast Club is winding down, I feel I have only skimmed the surface in my learning about what Nathan and Timothy need to help them flourish as spellers. Both individuals have strong personalities and determination, but they also have gentle souls and fragile hearts. While I have helped them to uncover their voices as writers, I feel a powerful need to protect them from

outside forces and the pressures that formal learning will place upon them - the expectations of mandated curriculums, standards testing and the future classrooms that may not honour their many contributions. The pressures will not change, for either them or for me, but our attitudes towards these external forces will have an impact on the way we handle situations that require us to perform under certain circumstances. Timothy and Nathan feel empowered, therefore they act with confidence and have a positive attitude about what they can do. They are collaborating and cooperating. They are able to make valuable contributions, giving them a feeling of being in control. Timothy and Nathan have input into their learning process and are allowed to make decisions as writers and spellers. Given this opportunity, they have begun to care about their writing, identifying it as something worth pursuing and spending time on. Most importantly, they are constructing their own understandings about reading, writing and spelling.

While Nathan and Timothy have shifted their thinking about their work, I have also shifted my thinking about my work. The act of writing down what is happening in my classroom and creating a trail of my thinking provides documentation that gives me insight into my teaching and into my learning. We conducted this inquiry as a class, trying to gather evidence and create a working document that would reflect our thinking. As I did this, I worked through the critical incidents that were happening in the class and made sense of my experience with the children. At first, as I looked through my data, sorted through my wonderings, and read over the stories I considered evidence, I thought that collectively needed to prove something. I thought I needed to create a scholarly story that had never been told before and an academic thesis that was unique and original. I was waiting for a spelling research revelation and kept waiting and waiting. As I

continued to write, I began recognizing how personal the act of writing is, that the stories I had recorded were embedded within my own classroom and that it was my voice and the children's voices that were central to the emerging curriculum being created. This alone, made this research different from all of the other "inquiry" or "spelling" stories out there. No one was living MY experience. This recognition made a huge shift in my thinking. I came to realize that my research is not about an 'aha' or something that has not been discovered before, but rather, that it is a way for me to construct meaning about an issue that has been particularly bothersome to me for a number of years now. While I learned a lot about spelling, I learned more about the process that activated my voice, involved me in problem solving and had me researching my own teaching. I am writing this thesis for me, a regular, classroom teacher who is identifying a question in her practice, pursuing possible solutions in the classroom, and wanting to genuinely learn from the children. I am at the center of this inquiry, living it from the inside; not as a passive observer who is merely going through the motions of inquiry. My initial research expectation of myself was relinquished. It has taken me a lot of "slow to grow" to even recognize that I was engaging in action research and doing this research for myself. When I recognized this, I began to care more intimately about the process (just like Timothy, Nathan and the rest of the children who began to care more about spelling within their writing) because it was personal and meaningful. Not only did my teaching practice improve, but the quality of my interactions with the children, both subtle and overt, were remarkably different. Viewing the world from this new perspective, shed light upon the children's and my interactions as a community of inquirers, and what it



really means to pursue an inquiry within a democratic context designed to support thoughtful and critical dialogue and action.

## **Conclusions: Coming Full Circle**

## **Life Lessons: What The Children Learned**

I love the simplicity with which children approach their present-day lives and the clarity with which they express their views of the world when given the opportunity. Our spelling inquiry is by no means sophisticated or elaborate, but the children relish the moments to collaborate and construct meaning together. I see our classroom as a microcosm of society, where we are all members of a community who value diversity and support one another. This validates the potential of inquiry in an educative setting, and while no one child comes out of an experience knowing the exact same thing, all the children learn what they have lived and learn from others' demonstrations enacted within the very social life of our classroom. Our study has given children insights into spelling, but even more than that, it has emphasized the learning process and the importance of drawing upon the significant experiences in their lives, all of which helped to shape the evolving curriculum.

As the children and I have delved into spelling and made it our inquiry, we have all come to understand spelling in a different light. On the simplest level, I think the children see spelling in a broader context and are able to construct meaning from their every day reading and writing experiences. They have invested interest in creating this knowledge together and realize that they all have the ability to problem solve and build understandings that further their own knowledge about language. They are dynamic participants, rather than passive receivers of information. The children have learned much more than could be categorized as spelling outcomes (although, happily, they have acquired a full repertoire of spelling strategies, knowledge about spelling patterns and the spellings of individual words).

It was a given understanding for me that the children would learn language and learn about language, however the following points reflect what they learned through language.

Because this study was different from other curricular inquiries we had engaged in, the children had to re-define what it meant to collaborate effectively with one another. In this study they were not grouped by topic interest, by vote or in multi-aged combinations, as per usual. They needed to find new ways to interact and to draw upon each other as resources. They were expected to learn about themselves - their strengths and their needs - as well as each other, in order to best support the language learning that was evolving. I believe the children learned about the power of relationship, since they needed to know members of their class well in order to collaborate and build knowledge together. These relationships allowed for risk-taking, for sharing uncertainties and for trusting each other, even when the going got tough. The more voices that were added to the WOW wall, the richer the learning experience and the more significant the celebration. While one person might initiate a mini-lesson or discovery, the conversation would then open up to everyone, as input was invited and decisions were made together. Knowledge was not owned by one person, rather, they all generated knowledge together and could teach one another. There was a constant interchange of individual and group thinking. Through observation of the children's interactions, I know that they believed their collective knowledge was much more powerful than their own individual thinking.

Spelling became more than just getting the words right. The children did not ask each other how many words they got correct, whether they received ten out of ten on a spelling test, or examined each other's word lists or scores after we began this inquiry.

They were much more interested in sharing writing together, gathering information to figure out whether they had a language discovery to highlight, or finding resources that would assist someone with uncertainties about spelling. Spelling held meaning, could promote conversation and would allow them to think together. It was not simply about mastery of words. Conventional spelling was not de-emphasized; instead, value was given to the process of becoming a strategic and thoughtful speller.

Spelling was much less competitive and comparative in nature, given the evolving nature of the children's discoveries. The focus was not on who is a good speller or who is not a good speller, but that we all have a need to spell when we write and we are all here to help one another generate ideas of how to proceed. Every child had a contribution to make and no matter how big or small the discovery, there was an open invitation to add to the evolving WOW wall. There was an unspoken understanding of the developmental aspect of spelling and a celebration of wherever children were at along this continuum. In this multi-age classroom even beginning writers felt validated and had equal opportunity to shine. They were genuinely as valued as those writers who already knew how to spell conventionally.

Short, Harste and Burke (1996) talk about the ideas of reflection and reflexivity and say that the difference between the two is that,

"in reflection you look back, while in reflexivity you interrogate the very constructs you are using to make sense of the world. The systematic collection of artifacts during the process of inquiry supports reflection. Through examination of these artifacts learners are able to reconstruct the mental journey that they have taken. They can reflect on what they have learned (content), how they have learned (process), and why they have learned (purpose)." (p.361-362)

While the children would not articulate their learning in these terms, I would say that this very idea was the essence of our WOW wall artifact as it served as a tool for allowing us

to engage in reflection and reflexivity. By articulating their thinking and making it explicit, the children brought spelling to conscious awareness. Rather than their thinking remaining a mystery, or something that they kept to themselves, it became a public artifact from which everyone learned.

The children were independent but also took ownership of their learning about spelling. This, in turn, motivated them to take control of their knowledge and believe in themselves as growing experts about spelling. They did not always turn to the teacher for answers, but also used their classmates as resources. They learned that there was a lot they could do and strategies they could draw upon, and also, that they could seek support from their peers if necessary.

In committing ourselves to spelling as an inquiry, the children came to view spelling as important and worth spending time on. The children recognized that spelling is valued, but not overemphasized. It is placed within the context of their writing and does not exist separately from the reading and writing process. The children felt validated when they saw me taking notes, documenting their words and taking great interest in their thinking. They were determined to be active participants throughout this process. We all worked towards what I perceived to be a long term goal, that is, the development of a "spelling consciousness" (Gentry, 1993, p. 5) within the context of their writing.

There is no checklist of what each child learned, nor is there a singular answer to the question, "What did the children learn?" If learning to spell is developmental, we know that children will understand what they are ready for and will use what they know to the best of their ability. Our study is just one example of how learning about spelling

has taken place. As I observe Nathan, while he is writing on a warm day in June, I realize the life lessons he has learned that capture the essence of our spelling inquiry and of the diversity of learners in our classroom community.

*Dear Grade Ones and Twos,  
I hope that you are going to do a great job on 'x' (multiplication)  
next year because I know that you can do it. I know that you can  
do the Maths test too, because I know you have it in you. I wish good  
luck to Emma when she is in Grade Two. When you are in Grade Three,  
Grade Twos, you will have to respect others. There is no choice  
because you are the oldest now. I know Erin is a good sport and he is  
really good at Maths, so I know that he will set a good example for the  
new kids. Probably Craig is going to have a tough time, like me sometimes,  
but I know he is going to try his best and that is what you are supposed  
to do - not always get it right, just to try.  
Love, Nathan*

His childlike wisdom speaks to the recognition that life is full of challenges and expectations along the way, however with encouragement and determination, it is possible to continue to grow, striving for your personal best. There is an interesting sense of depth to Nathan's letter: each child he singles out reflects similar personal and learning struggles to his own, and he addresses them in a hopeful and positive way. He speaks of the mentoring role that the oldest children have in our classroom, and how he has truly risen to that challenge this final year with us. I am moved when I hear him speaking to Craig as if he were talking to himself. While initially I thought this could be a bit condescending, I wonder if Nathan sees a part of himself in Craig, and he wants to let him know that things will be okay. I think about his personal challenges and wonder about his image of himself as a learner - trying hard, but not always getting it right. It is a compelling piece of writing and reminds me of the cyclical nature of our life in the classroom.

In reference to writing, Lucy Calkins (1991) talks about the purpose that notebooks have in helping us lead more "wide-awake lives". This spelling inquiry has helped the children to lead more "wide-awake lives". The lessons they have learned are ones which will help them through life's opportunities and challenges, not simply through their spelling experiences.



## Wherever You Go There You Are

There is a book by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994) entitled, Wherever You Go There You Are. It talks about the art of cultivating mindfulness in one's life. His title of the book accurately reflects what I believe to be the closing chapter of this thesis. He says,

*To allow ourselves to be truly in touch with where we already are, no matter where that is, we have got to pause in our experience long enough to let the present moment sink in; long enough to actually feel the present moment, to see it in its fullness, to hold it in awareness and thereby come to know and understand it better (p.xiv).*

Spelling took on a life of its own in our classroom, and began to unfold with the help of the children. The process of inquiry was also influenced by the attention and awareness arising out of my own self-understanding. Through my writing, it became necessary to look at the present moments and to examine them carefully. In doing this, I came to know and understand spelling as inquiry from a new perspective. We have all come to know about spelling in greater depth, we have made mindful decisions as individuals and also collaboratively as a community of inquirers. I remind myself that this is but one moment in time, however, as the cycle continues with new questions to be asked and new tensions to explore. This is the heart of an inquiry.

While living a collaborative inquiry in language research, some of the ownership and power was shifted to the children. As I accepted that there was not going to be a linear, controlled quality to our study, the language teaching opened up and started to evolve in exciting ways. I did not need to incorporate a bunch of trite activities that documented past learning, but rather, we could establish spelling frameworks that would allow us to find tools that created new meanings and generated excitement about language. This kind of language teaching in the classroom allowed children to pursue

spelling as a collaborative inquiry, and more importantly, illustrates that spelling is an evolving rather than a static body of knowledge.

The following points reflect how my thinking has grown to include spelling as collaborative inquiry.

Spelling is a social experience. The children built a social network that addressed real-life purposes for learning about spelling. Their keen interest in this experience engaged them in an open dialogue about the process. Spelling became our topic of conversation. Allowing the children to play with language and talk about language, led them to construct their own understandings of a spelling concept or strategy. This was essential to their development as spellers. We gathered to share our knowledge, to teach one another, and to problem solve together; all of which facilitated meaningful interactions about spelling. The children were willing to share their ideas with each other, without fear of judgement or criticism from their peers. They were each other's best motivators, supporters and encouragers. Each child's inquiry informed the larger community. The children benefitted from one another and were required to consider and think about spelling in ways that they would not necessarily have had to without the support and challenge of the group's collaboration. I learned to trust that children can teach one another, can learn from another, and that if I listened carefully enough, they would lead me to what they needed next. Learning to be a good teacher of spelling, within the context of a reading-writing environment, begins by giving children a forum for important discussions. It means taking the time to be a good listener and allowing the thinking process to evolve, in a collaborative fashion, as one thought collective. This social dynamic, with the children by my side as co-collaborators, helped me to plan for

instruction that was tailored to their needs. We all became learners who were excited to research spelling together.

Spelling is inseparable from the reading, writing and problem solving that takes place in our classroom. In fact, spelling is a part of the everyday work that we do - it is not an add-on or an extra. I realized that rather than having bits and pieces of spelling instruction that I had to try to attend to on a regular basis - the personal dictionary, the class word wall, the morning message and the magnetic alphabet letters that we occasionally used for mini-lessons - it would be more effective to hone in on mini-lessons that highlighted the reading and writing that we were currently doing and to create curriculum around the strengths and needs of learners as a basis for planning teaching and learning experiences. The add-on activities ate up a lot of time and were not particularly the most effective spelling resources I could utilize. We were able to channel this now available time to be active readers and writers, with a new focus on reflecting and demonstrating what we were learning. It felt much more productive to use our time in this way.

Spelling is authentic, purposeful and relevant to the children in our classroom community. It is not necessarily about the teaching strategies, the activities that are set up in the learning environment, or the lessons that I plan, but rather, it is about my understanding of literacy and of language development and my knowledge of the children in my class. Gentry's (1987) statement rings true to the work that I have been doing throughout this inquiry on spelling:

*"In my view, the important questions center on an understanding of how children learn, and the important answers place children, not methods, at the center of the spelling program" (p. 27).*

Spelling is taught by carefully observing the learners and their work. This shows me what to do next. It is this kidwatching that makes my plans unique and my decision making complex, since there are different children each year. Bean and Bouffler's thoughts, in their book, Spell by Writing (1987), resonate with me when I think about our spelling inquiry. They say that,

*"Although the teaching strategies may well be the most interesting part of the book to many teachers, it is important that those who find the strategies useful understand the thinking about language, especially reading and writing, that underpins them. It is this understanding, not the strategies themselves, that gives teachers control in their classrooms. No two classrooms are the same, and so no teaching strategy is necessarily appropriate for each class or all children in a class. Some of our best teaching strategies may go unused and we may be forced to develop others" (p.5).*

This is exactly how I feel about our inquiry. My experience has confirmed why it is impossible to use a pre-packaged program, when it has been so critical to tailor what I do to meet the various needs of the children. When we were engaged in pursuing spelling as an inquiry, I found that the demonstrations were purposeful and served a particular child's or group of children's need. This is what sparked their interest. They wanted to become involved and to make connections, especially when their connections had the potential to assist others in their spelling endeavours. Textbooks, literacy centers or standards tests can never replace the diversity and excitement level that an inquiry can generate. They can also never replace the higher level of thinking that goes along with inquiry and the collaboration that a community experiences. Spelling had a presence and developed a life of its own - one that had the children caring about their writing and taking time to reflect upon their process.

Spelling is a process. Spelling is a much more complex thinking process than I had anticipated. Thinking about spelling meant thinking about our reading, thinking about strategies, thinking about each other, working collaboratively as a thought collective and thinking about how we would articulate our learning. Our inquiry became a documentation of the children's unfolding insights about how they figured things out. The children flourished when given the opportunity to construct their understandings at a pace in tune with their own agendas. Their process had an extra dimension, one that required them to make decisions about their learning and to demonstrate how they made those decisions. They needed to reflect upon what worked well for them as a speller and what did not. No matter where they were on the continuum, all the children had a contribution to make and their spelling strategies reflected "increasingly sophisticated hypotheses about the structure of written language" (Weaver, 1990, p. 84). The children's spelling development was individual, and even if they did not use a strategy or apply their learning right away, this did not mean that their learning had little long-term impact. It was just as likely to show up in a later conversation. Gentry (1987) states that, "Spelling is not a passive process. It is dynamic and complex. To learn to spell... had to think" (p.17). We lived this process through this inquiry experience. Spelling is not only a cognitive process, but it incites curiosity, invites children to be interested, to ask questions and to wonder. My process involved supporting children in these endeavours.

Teaching spelling as a process requires explanation, demonstration and inclusion of parents in the conversation. The inquiry process we have engaged in is consistent with my beliefs and has made a difference in the way that I plan for, build upon and teach a

curriculum around spelling with the children. Everything we did was exposed and displayed around the classroom and in evidence in our work. These were works in progress, that created a trail of thinking that documented our journey. The visual representation on our classroom walls allowed parents to see the process unfold and they were fascinated to observe how the children were drawing upon their current knowledge about language. By having the children show their process and explain their strategies to their parents it became clear to their parents what they knew and what they understood. Parents were curious and elicited further information from their children about the process. They commented that what we were doing made sense for children, since it highlighted aspects of language that were relevant to their writing and supported development of a deeper understanding of why spelling patterns or strategies made sense. They were surprised at the enthusiasm and children's talk about the spelling curriculum we were building, and how it was always embedded in a meaningful experience rather than an isolated incident. After seeing the process, parents were open to having a conversation about what we were trying to do, rather than dismissing it as something trendy or new. They began to care because their children had such an interest and were making connections they themselves had never considered.

The assessment of spelling is on-going and informs instruction. We proceed with all inquiries this way, however it seemed that the assessment of spelling had previously come only at the end of the writing process, when revising and editing. While this is part of the writing process, particularly with pieces that have an audience, we discovered that there were also interactive opportunities for the children to make sense of their spelling *while* writing. The children were able to dialogue about the WOW wall, referring back

and forth to the spelling strategies and discoveries that were made. The curriculum emerged as the children contributed to the process. Behind the scenes, I brainstormed for potentials and possibilities, making hypotheses about what direction the wall (or lesson) might take. I read through the spelling literature which not only grounded me, but also informed my curricular decisions and helped to shed light on my growing understanding of the sense the children were making about spelling. As I listened and took the time to conference with children as they were writing, in order to observe what they knew and to make note of the kinds of mistakes they were making, I was better able to dialogue with them about their questions, wonderings and challenges. Rather than simply plugging along and going through a consecutive series of lessons or activities, I attended to the children's needs and I asked myself questions such as, "What are they understanding? What are they ready for?" When I stopped fretting about what was going to come next and let the curriculum evolve, I was able to respond flexibly and better support what the children were excited to learn. This required me to live in the present, carefully observing and noticing with children, rather than only waiting until the end to act as an editor of their work and to then teach the skills I believed they needed.

When I began to broaden my view of spelling, and to think of it as more than just getting the words right or coming up with a close approximation of a word, I was able to open up my definition to include, "developing an interest in words" (Snowball & Bolton, 1999, p.5) and to see spelling within the larger context of language learning, rather than simply word study. Now there was room for reading and writing engagements that were more open-ended and which allowed for individual input and response to diverse learning needs. The frameworks that were established enabled the children to take the lead, rather

than setting them up to be passive receivers of knowledge with words being forced upon them from outside of their writing process. Our process allowed children to contribute when it made sense for them to do so, and when it fit in with a reading or writing engagement that they were involved in. Children began to notice subtleties of language when least expected, not only within a writing context. We redefined what it means to spell - illustrating the complexity of language that is often misunderstood and understated.

Most of all, this inquiry into spelling reminded me of the power of relationships and how, within an atmosphere of respect, comradry and trust, risk-taking falls into place and there is an openness to share concerns and a willingness to display vulnerabilities without fear of criticism. When children feel safe, they share their own experiences and bring their voices to a situation. These personal connections mean everything, and it is through these connections that we come to know one another well. This sense of relationship, built within the classroom, parallels my journey as a learner and how necessary it has been to have a support group who have encouraged me as I have pursued my studies.

On the last day of school, Timothy presents me with a gift that I treasure and linger over. Tears fill my eyes as I hold his beautifully framed note in my hands.



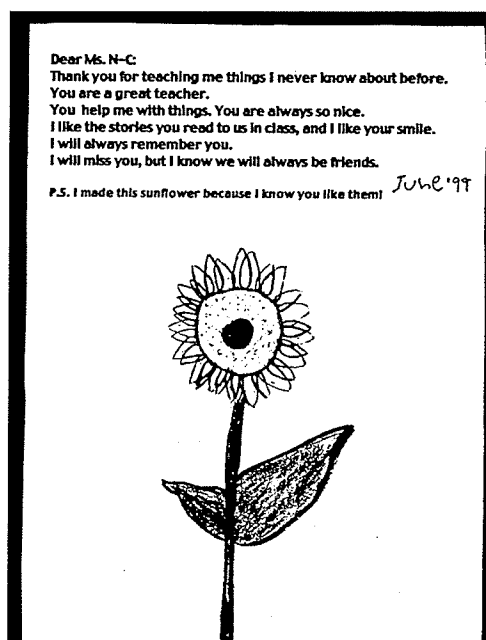


Figure 39. Timothy's letter

It means more to me than he realizes. I only have to take one glance at his piece to recognize the value he places on living in our learning community. Our relationship has been integral to his learning over the past three years and our time together has helped him to grow. It has helped me to grow, also. While cultivating mindfulness in our classroom life, I have thought carefully about optimal growing conditions and about paying close attention when preparing the soil, understanding fully that the key to growth is nurturing each plant and knowing it well. This takes considerable research, close observation, a collaborative community to share experiences with, and a willingness to take risks and to try new things. Of course, I want results and want to stand back admiring everything I have planted in full bloom. However, weather patterns are never consistent, there are wide variations amongst plants, and what is optimal for one plant is not always successful for another. It is not as simple as it looks, but it is a labour of love.

As a professional, I am responsible for the decisions that I make. Becoming involved in teacher research has allowed me to study and critically explore an aspect of my classroom that I perceived as wanting. We all seek to improve our practice and to find new ideas, but teacher research is more than that. It is about systematically asking questions, researching current literature and examining practice. Action research pushes teaching practice forward and makes professional development personal and relevant to the person engaging in it. Once I adopted a teacher researcher stance, it meant opening up and being honest with myself in an area in which I was not comfortable. My research allowed me to be vulnerable, especially with those whom I was sharing my writing. This changed the way I thought about myself as a teacher and I sought others with whom to engage in conversations that were in-depth and thought-provoking and that questioned practice. My passion for teaching and for actively pursuing research in my classroom has been rewarding, but I have also felt hesitant about pursuing discussions with colleagues who have not necessarily taken a similar stance. I had this naive expectation that the "habit of questioning" (Laminack & Wood, 1996) was a way of living and that once I opened up, others would also be willing to share their beliefs about a common issue like spelling. I have learned that such discussions can be intimidating for many colleagues. Publicly questioning their own practice and admitting that they do not have all of the answers, can be threatening. Such philosophical discussion with colleagues continue to be a personal struggle for me.

As one journey ends, another begins. I cannot separate the learning that the children in my class have been engaged from my own learning. The children have impacted my decision making and have forced me to ask difficult questions that needed

to be pursued. Patty Lather (1986) reminds me that we are always looking to learn from and with others, both colleagues and children. For me, as a teacher, it is the conversations that we have that are the elixir for further thought.

*At the core of the transformation is "a reciprocal relationship where every teacher is always a student and every pupil a teacher." Thus, critical inquiry is a fundamentally dialogic and mutually educative enterprise. The present is cast against a historical backdrop while at the same time, the "naturalness" of social arrangements is challenged so that social actors can see both the constraints and the potential for change in their situations (p. 268).*

I need people to think with, to share stories with, to struggle with, to make decisions with, but it is critical to have a solid belief system of my own upon which to refer. More than ever, I realize that the life of an inquirer poses challenges, but is rewarding; provokes thought, yet is reflective in nature; is messy, but deliberate and intentional; and is full of questions, with the occasional answer. Inquiry opens up a whole new world and a new way of thinking about things. Life as an inquirer has depth and quality. If life as an inquirer has made such a difference to my life, it would make sense to want this quality of life for the learners in my care. Spelling had to reflect the kind of life that we led in the classroom. This is perhaps why it took so much courage for me to pursue spelling and allow myself to be vulnerable in an area of my practice that posed uncertainty. This professional study was personal. Our classroom inquiry had to reflect who I am as a teacher and what I am comfortable with. It is not merely a project approach or a thematic study, but rather, inquiry is a stance or a philosophical way of thinking about curriculum, children, and about learning in general. Pursuing spelling as an inquiry was not a question about how to spell something, but about discovering the different paths learners may take to arrive there, listening to the connections that children were making and finding my role in facilitating this process.

I still have much to learn, however, inquiry is humbling, providing gentle reminders that there are no absolute and finite answers. I have made progress, if I define inquiry as Short, Harste and Burke (1996) do:

*"Progress in inquiry is having new understandings and new questions to ask. The term 'understandings' highlights the temporal nature of what we learn in contrast to 'answers' which signal that what we learn from one experience will never change... We don't inquiry to eliminate alternatives but to find more functional understandings - to create diversity, broaden our thinking and ask more complex questions" (p.260).*

With this thought in mind, I am also reminded of the wisdom of Jon Kabat-Zinn, that "only then can we accept the truth of this moment in our life, learn from it, and move on" (p.xiv). This thesis reflects but one moment of my life. It is now time to move on. I have come full circle in this inquiry, with new understandings but also with new questions that will take me through another cycle of learning. The learning never ends.

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