Research-Based Spelling

SITTON SPELLING AND WORD SKILLS®
Rebecca Sitton

by Beth G. Davis

Introduction

Through the years, spelling has often been viewed as the poor sister of the language arts and as such has not experienced the variety of instructional methods that have characterized the teaching of reading and writing (Adams, 1991). With the advent of spell check on computers, the impetus to seek research-based strategies for effective spelling teaching is even less of a priority, although spelling has been the focus of a number of researchers—Bear and Templeton (1998), Ehri (1992), Horn (1969), Peters (1985), Zutell (1996), and others.

In many cases, spelling has been taught in a nearly identical fashion in most elementary classrooms. Teachers identify a base of words at the beginning of each week, administer a pretest, have children practice the words during the week, and test the words on Friday. Perhaps once a month or at the end of a unit, the Friday test will include words from the previous weeks. Identifying common phonic elements, practicing writing the words with various exercises during the week, and memorizing are the key learning strategies.

Sitton Spelling and Word Skills® has as its primary goal "forever spellers" who "learn to spell for writing" (Sourcebook, Level 1, p. vii) rather than the Friday test goal. Emphasizing instruction tailored to: individual needs; the importance of explicit, direct teaching; proofreading and self checking; the central role of word study; the recycling of skills; using the known to discover the unknown; and the bond between spelling and writing, this spelling program culls best practices from the research into a multifaceted program that bolsters and enriches the entire classroom language arts curriculum.

Direct, explicit instruction, shown to be important for spelling acquisition (Peters, 1985; Spiegel, R.T., 1992; Zutell, 1996; Templeton and Morris, 1999) is a hallmark of this program, where the teacher plays a very active and central role. Peters (1985) speaks of the teacher's task as that of directing students' attention to 'catch' spelling. As the "expert other" (Vygotsky, 1978), the teacher assists students at that "zone of proximal development" between the skills they have attained and those presenting difficulty. What the teacher assists with soon becomes an independent skill, therein establishing a new zone. This scaffolding of instruction requires not only the explicit teaching found at all levels of *Sitton Spelling* but the ability to differentiate instruction according to need as well. The Sourcebooks and Practice Books, with their myriad of activities, skills and assessment techniques, both allow and actively encourage teachers to individualize.

Word Choice

Sitton Spelling utilizes 1200 Core Words selected for their frequency of use in writing. These represent and exceed the 1000 word number that has been identified to make up 90% of the words used in routine written communication (Sipe, p. 75, 2003). Thomas Horn in 1969 wrote, "It is very probable that spelling ability is best developed and

Sitton Spelling and Word Skills®
has as its primary goal "forever spellers" who "learn to spell for writing".

maintained in the long run through stimulation of, and careful attention to, the writing that children do. On the other hand, there is as yet no field-tested substitute for direct instruction on the basic core of high-frequency words needed in child and adult writing"(p. 1285).

Levels 1–8

The teaching units in Levels 1–8 of the program all follow a similar format. All begin with the Word Preview. Here the teacher introduces the Core Words for the unit. The Core Words are familiar words that students already can read. "Children should not be expected to correctly spell words they can not read or words they rarely hear or use" (Zutell, R.T. p. 609, 1990). The Core Words are not necessarily the students' spelling words, but rather the words are used as a springboard to build essential skills and concepts in each unit.

Visual Skills and Automaticity

The Word Preview uses these Core Words to build visual skills needed for good spelling and proofreading and that are key to making students lifelong spellers. The importance of visual skills was revealed in a large-scale research study of spelling and handwriting by Peters in 1970 (Peters, 1991). Documenting children's spelling progress and teaching strategies from a total age group of a local district's primary school population throughout their last two primary school years, "one of the findings most relevant to the teaching of spelling was that the most significant factor was visual perception of word form", a finding repeatedly confirmed since (p. 220). Adams (1991) cites research "that seeing a word in print is not just superior to hearing it spelled but is an extremely powerful and effective means of acquiring its spelling" (p. 396). The second important factor was swift, legible handwriting, leading Peters to conclude that "…spelling is primarily a visuo-motor activity" (p. 220) and that practice in writing letter sequences is a critical aspect of spelling acquisition.

The *Sitton Spelling* Sourcebooks provide direct, explicit instruction that develops students' abilities to picture the sequential letters of a familiar word

from their long-term memory bank and develop the proofreading skills to verify their efforts. Students are asked to carefully check their written production of each sequential letter in a word as well as self-correct in a rewrite. "Spelling is 'caught'" through the child's developing forms of imagery and serial reconstructions and, as a consequence of this becoming accustomed to the probability of letter sequences occurring" (Peters, p.37, 1985). Peters describes spelling as a type of grammar in which the occurrence of letter strings/combinations ranges from highly likely, to likely, and on through impossible. The continual repetition throughout the Word Preview helps to develop automatic attention to the written word, its letter string(s), and whether it "looks right"; that is, a proofreading state of mind.

Samuels (1979) speaks of automaticity as action without conscious effort. As students reread what they have written, they are primed from the repetitive visual training of the Word Preview to have an awareness of words not looking right and to know the steps available to them for correcting. In checking their spelling attempts with the help of a reference, students circle only what is incorrect in the word, helping them to zero in on what needs correcting. "Expert spellers develop a visual memory for words… Having kids correct their own errors immediately seems to aid their memory" (Gentry, 1987). The skills taught in the Word Preview help students to avoid careless errors of known words in their every day writing thereby encouraging writing fluency.

The Core Words used in the Word Preview to develop visual skills are then used in the second activity in each of the teaching units, the Exercise Express. These six optional activities may be used at anytime once the students are familiar with what is expected. These activities, developing from the Core Words, (stretching simple sentences; finishing sentence starters; fixing errors in sentences; word sorts; adding words to an identified pattern; and finding words to add to a pattern) teach students processes and strategies for examining and thinking about words and their application in writing (Sourcebook, Level 1, p. 152).

The Word Preview uses Core Words to build visual skills needed for good spelling and proofreading and that are key to making students lifelong spellers.

Word Study

Word study makes an important contribution to learning to spell correctly. "What students store in memory about specific words' spellings is regulated in part by what they know about the general system. Learners who lack the knowledge are left with rote memorization which takes longer and is more easily forgotten" (Ehri, p. 308, 1992). Funnell (1992) offers an equally compelling need for word study. She posits that being able to read a word is not a guarantee that one can spell the word or even necessarily detect misspellings, especially if the appropriate letters are present but incorrectly ordered. Good spellers require a more complete orthographic description where letter position is critical. Word study examines the complete orthographic makeup of words and word parts and helps to cement visual recognition and memory of the appropriate letter strings.

Word study, further, acknowledges the role of meaning and grammar in spelling. "An effective word study program provides students with many formal and informal opportunities to examine words carefully, explore their orthographic forms in relation to their meanings and uses, and develop reliable and efficient strategies for independent word learning" (Zutell, p. 107, 1996). It integrates the various aspects of language – phonics, word structure, word meaning, and sentence structure. Words may be looked at in isolation but they are taken from and returned to written context. Good teaching helps students 'catch' the conventions that each of these aspects of language impose on word spellings.

Word study is meant to follow the instructional needs of students at the developmental stages at which research has suggested children acquire spelling skill (Bear and Templeton, 1998; Bear et al 2000; Ehri, 1997). In harmony with their growth in reading and writing, students become more sophisticated in their knowledge of the information that spelling represents – alphabetic (letter sound left to right matching), pattern (vowel chunks and syllable groupings), and meaning (constancy of spelling despite variant

sound as in *prefer/preference*; difference in spelling and meaning with constancy of sound as in *bear, bare*). As students move through these stages, from prephonemic or emergent, to letter name-alphabetic, to within word pattern, to syllables and affixes, to derivational relations (Bear et al, 2000), word study instruction and activities should be chosen to cement and advance the particulars of growing spelling usage that students show they are capable of understanding.

In the Seeds for Sowing Skills section, word study builds skills and concepts. The Seeds for Sowing Skills section includes a number of suggestions for instruction in appropriate concepts. Under each concept is a menu of activities usually at varying levels of challenge. The Sourcebooks suggest that teachers choose activities that coordinate with the total language curriculum for the class and are appropriate for some or all of the students. It is not expected that every activity will be used. At the same time, it does not matter if all of the students are exposed to each concept in a unit. That is because the concepts are revisited again and again throughout the Sourcebooks.

Spiraling, Deepening, and Extending Skills and Concepts

Spiraling skills allows the teacher to individualize instruction so that students have the readiness to benefit. In addition, students who are not as able as others to 'catch' instruction the first time around are given many opportunities to achieve mastery. A scope and sequence chart found at the end of each Sourcebook lists the skills and concepts that comprise the program and where they may be found. Skills are not limited strictly to spelling and cover the whole range of hearing, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking.

Zutell (1996) concurs with many of the findings that have emerged from the developmental approach to spelling described above from which it is recognized that a progressive understanding of the ways in which words 'work' is crucial to spelling acquisition. Patterns that are discovered first in familiar words are then found and related to a broadening expansion of less familiar words.

Word study makes an important contribution to learning to spell correctly. "What students store in memory about specific words' spellings is regulated in part by what they know about the general system. Learners who lack the knowledge are left with rote memorization which takes longer and is more easily forgotten."

Concept building exercises in the Sourcebooks begin with the familiar Core Words and cull like patterns from numbers of oral and written sources to which students are exposed, as they learn to relate the known to the unknown. Learning by analogy expands their reading and meaning vocabularies along with their spelling progress. Starting at the early levels this may be seen as they build words by adding letters to known Core Words that are also rimes such as *and*, resulting in possibilities as simple as *band* or progressively difficult as *strand* or *understand*. Using the Core Words the teacher is able to help students generate hundreds of words from the 37 high frequency rimes cited in professional texts (Adams, 1990; Cunningham, 2000).

At Level 6, beginning with the Core Word *scale* with its silent *e*, students look at other words exhibiting silent letters, moving from simpler "gn" words like *sign,* to the more difficult words like *campaign* and *align,* and on to more difficult silent letters like the "l" in *salmon*. In addition they learn about word origins, such as, that silent letters in words such as *yacht* are the result of borrowings from other languages (p.155). Adding affixes to Core Words enables instruction not only about vocabulary but plurals, possessives, and comparatives, as well as how root meanings trump spelling over sound (Bear and Templeton, 1998; Bear et al, 2000). Core Words also generate homophones and homographs.

Word study concepts are often taught and practiced with word sorts. By comparing, contrasting, and classifying patterns within words, students reinforce concepts about how words work, about their structure and the importance of letter sequence and how these inform both sound and meaning (Templeton and Morris, 1999). Word sorts comply with Zutell's conviction that the best teaching and practice activities provide numerous opportunities for students to write the applicable words. As important, however, are the opportunities they present that encourage students to discover word relationships and thereby "develop strategies for remembering the difficult parts" (Zutell, p. 103, 1996).

The Exercise Express activities, Sort It, Add It, and Find It, which work on classifying patterns, are activities where Core Words and the skills students have been working with may be practiced. These activities, like the skill building activities, contribute to the atmosphere of developmental and differentiated instruction. There are many choices for activity procedures. For example, they may be assigned as a whole class, small group, partner, or individual activity, or as homework. Within any of those choices, the demands or expectations may differ for some or all students. It is the teacher's decision as to which activities in both the Exercise Express and the Seeds for Sowing Skills sections are used, as well as when and how. "To plan effective instruction, the teacher must know not only where the student presently is, but where he or she needs to go next" (Templeton and Morris, p. 111, 1999).

Spelling to Write, Writing to Spell

Researchers who focus on effective spelling instruction (Peters, 1985; Wilde, 1990; Templeton, 1999) speak about spelling as more than knowing the words for the Friday test. It is also in the writing that students do in and out of class that spelling knowledge needs to show. "The real foundation for spelling is frequent writing" (Gentry, p. 33, 1987). Many of the activities in the Exercise Express are aimed at expanding students' opportunities for writing where the transfer of spelling skills may be observed. In Stretch It, students respond to a series of guidewords to expand sentences. Sentence starters are used for the activity Finish It. Both of these, in addition to Fix It where sentences are given for error revision, have students apply the proofreading skills taught and practiced with the Word Preview. The success that students achieve when they are able to self-correct their writing develops a self-confidence that results in expanding writing output (Peters, 1985).

All of the skill building teaching and practice in the Sourcebooks, the visual, as well as the word study components, have as its primary goal students who spell correctly and fluently

in whatever writing they do. The ability to proofread, therefore, is of primary importance. Although proofreading is taught and practiced with the Word Preview and practiced further in Exercise Express activities, every unit also includes a section titled Priority Words. The focus of this section is to proofread for what are identified in the Sourcebook as Priority Words, the highest frequency words for which correct spelling is always expected in students' writing. Referred to as "no excuses" words, "they designate a minimum competency for spelling accountability" (Sourcebook Level 1, p.164).

Students are given a Priority Word list which is continually growing. They are responsible, with the help of a provided spelling reference, for proofreading all of their work, regardless of subject, to ensure that they spell these words accurately every time. Because students are encouraged to write right from the beginning, invented spelling is the norm for students in early levels. Proofreading for a growing list of Priority Words helps students to recognize that over time all words need to be spelled correctly, that spelling counts. The skills they are gaining from the Word Preview (visual) and Seeds for Sowing Skills (word study) provide further encouragement. All along the way, other words may be added to individual lists when appropriate. Proofreading time is provided in class for writing assignments, and once a week the teacher collects and checks a piece of everyday writing. Any errors are noted and the papers are returned to the students to correct.

Funnell's research (1992), discussed on page 3, explains why even some students who read well may fail to recognize their misspellings if they have not fully learned the spelling of a word, that is, the complete linear description of its letter identities. Proofreading with *Sitton Spelling* gives students the Priority Word lists, their individual spelling lists, word walls—a number of sources against which students may match their written words letter for letter. Griffith and Leavell (1995) stress the importance of having these kinds of resources available in the classroom to help students apply proofreading skills.

Assessment

Informal assessment of Priority Words occurs with the classroom writing that students do. Informal assessment of an essential visual, language, and/or word study skill, which has been the focus of the Word Preview, Exercise Express, and Seeds for Sowing Skills sections of each unit occurs in the section called Test Ready. The activities found there, one for school and one for home, zero in on the skill, which will be formally tested in the upcoming Skill Test section. While the teacher chooses which activities to use for which students in the Exercise Express and Seeds for Sowing Skills sections, the Test Ready activities are intended for all of the students in a class. Differentiation may come in the grouping configurations chosen. The home activity may be done at school for some or all children. For the home tasks, blackline masters are provided.

More formal assessment of the words and skills taught throughout the Sourcebooks occurs in the second part of each unit, which is called Assess Words and Skills. The first assessment, the Word Test, is a cloze-story or story context in which the Core Words have been deleted. Bear and Templeton (1998) advocate working with words outside of context and then returning the words back to a context. In addition to the meaning assistance that the context may convey, it is within the visual field of context that students should be demonstrating their proficiency. Students do not pre-study the words for the Word Test, but they have been working with some of them throughout the unit, and with others in previous units. Any of the words misspelled here become their individual spelling words for home and school study. The program provides a number of resources for them to record their personal study lists of spelling words. Each subsequent Word Test, in addition to using the Core Words introduced in the unit, draws from the bank of previous Core Words. Thus the words recycle numerous times through the Word Tests. This test-study-test format recommended in the research on spelling assessment (Allred, 1984; Gentry, 1990) gives students many opportunities for retesting to achieve mastery and to progress

Many of the activities are aimed at expanding students' opportunities for writing where the transfer of spelling skills may be observed.

at their appropriate developmental level. The teacher, noting which words are troublesome for which students, structures reteaching and practice with the word study strategy—read, spell, cover, print, proofread (Peters, 1985; Schlagal, 1998; Bear, 2000), as well as through the numerous activity opportunities previously cited. Since many of the words tested are also Priority Words that must always be spelled correctly, informal assessment, proofreading, and self-correcting is ongoing.

Following the Word Test is the Skill Test. It assesses the particular skill that has been the focus of the Test Ready section. Because the Sourcebooks promote both visual and word study skills as crucial ingredients for spelling success, it is important to assess students' progress in retaining these language skills and concepts. For students who have trouble with the skill, the Test Ready exercises may be revisited. The skill building and practice sections of the units will recycle the skill multiple times, and there will be numerous assessment opportunities for students to demonstrate progress/mastery.

An optional assessment choice is the Sentence Dictation Test. This test is made up of sentences relating to one another, forming a short story and is used for students needing more practice or challenge, again testing many of the Core Words. This provides not only additional confirmation of the Word Test findings but information on capitalization and punctuation as well. Like the Word Test, the Sentence Dictation Test assesses long-term mastery. Words that are missed are recorded with their other spelling words on their "words to learn" sheet or spelling notebooks.

In addition, at Levels 5 through 8, a Proofreading Test is administered to all students. The test allows students to practice following directions and gaining familiarity with the format of standardized tests. Students are given the editing tasks of finding and/or correcting spelling and/or punctuation. The importance of proofreading and editing skills in *Sitton Spelling* has been documented above. Wilde (1990) bemoans the fact that teachers often return student papers having circled

or corrected spelling and punctuation errors rather than seeking to encourage independent proofreading, a task for which they may have had little or no instruction. "Students need, from the beginning, [age appropriate] guidance in how to produce a polished final draft, which is presumably the ultimate goal of spelling instruction" (pp.285-86). Proofreading skills are significantly addressed in all of the units from Level 1 on, especially in the Practice Books, where there is a proofreading practice page for each corresponding unit. Although the skills are assessed informally in all student work, the Proofreading Test at levels 5 through 8 allows the teacher a more focused evaluation of how well students are progressing with these skills and where more practice may be indicated.

Other assessments for *Sitton Spelling* include achievement tests administered at three points during the year. Like with the Word Test, a cloze-story format is used. Blackline masters are used for all of the Word, Skill, and Proofreading Tests, facilitating record keeping for the teacher.

Efficacy Study: Students GLE Gains on WJ III Spelling Subtest by Grade and Program

DAVENPORT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
DAVENPORT, WASHINGTON
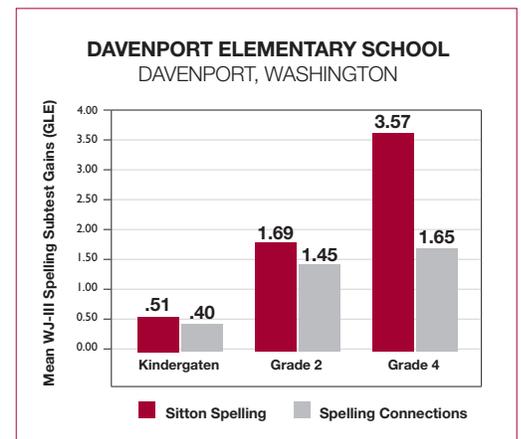
An independent study conducted during the 2010/2011 school year indicates gains in spelling performance among students in kindergarten, grade 2 and grade 4 using *Sitton Spelling* as compared to another spelling program. The gains were particularly significant in grade 4.

Students were pre-and post-tested using the *Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement®* (WJIII) Spelling subtest. To read the complete study, visit eps.schoolspecialty.com/research.

Sitton Kindergarten Literacy and Word Skills

Sitton Kindergarten Literacy and Word Skills was designed with the same philosophy as the rest of the Sitton program, but it addresses a unique set of challenges. Like Levels 1–8, the kindergarten level teaches spelling as part of a larger literacy picture. But unlike the higher levels, it is meant for children at the very beginning of their formal education—children who, by and large, are just learning to read and write. So what exactly does that mean for spelling instruction?

A key prerequisite to literacy is developing the oral language skills of listening (to stories, to instructions, for individual sounds in words) and speaking (sharing experiences, using complete sentences, and speaking in "school language" within the school setting). *Sitton Kindergarten Literacy and Word Skills* is filled with opportunities to hear and use oral language—read-alouds, retellings, discussion, and meaning vocabulary, to name just a few. It provides a strong beginning to a wider scope of literacy skills to come—a bridge, as it were, to the rest of the *Sitton Spelling* series.

While developing oral language skills is key in *Sitton Kindergarten Literacy and Word Skills*, the program helps children progress to the next level of word knowledge. Linnea Ehri's (1997) groundbreaking study gives a description of how word knowledge develops in beginning readers, noting four levels: Level 1: Pre-alphabetic; Level 2: Partial alphabetic; Level 3: Full alphabetic; and Level 4: Consolidated alphabetic. The study shows, furthermore, that the stages of *spelling* development are incredibly similar to the stages of *reading* development. In fact, Ehri points out that invented spelling actually provides a snapshot of what children know about letters and sounds. This connection between reading and spelling led her to conclude that "the reason why spelling

helps reading is that spelling instruction helps to cultivate students' knowledge of the alphabetic system which benefits processes used in reading" (Ehri, p. 261).

Once this close connection was established, it made sense to teach children **how to read and how to spell** simultaneously. After all, encoding (writing/spelling) is just the flip side of decoding. And with more and more children entering school who seriously lack preliteracy skills, using this connection in kindergarten may help get more children off to a good start.

Since comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading, it makes sense to help children reach this goal as soon as possible. Rasinski et al (2008) say, "One…special ingredient able to promote and develop the meaningful integration of word recognition, accuracy, fluency, and expressiveness is rhyming poetry" (p. 257). Why? Common spelling patterns, such as word families, have consistent pronunciations. Knowing several word families—such as those taught in *Sitton Kindergarten Literacy and Word Skills*—"can help readers partially decode thousands of words in which these word families regularly appear" (p. 257).

Rasinski et al go on to explain why rhyming poetry is such a useful medium. There is much evidence that children who do repeated reading are more likely to become accurate, fluent readers who comprehend what they read. Giving children a purpose for these repeated readings provides motivation, and performance for an audience is one of the most powerful motivators. Rhyming poetry, as presented in this program's Children's Theater event, provides that purpose.

Sitton Kindergarten Literacy and Word Skills comprises three components: a Sourcebook, a Practice Book, and a set of posters.

The centerpiece of the first part of each unit, Build Literacy Skills, is an interactive read-aloud of a classic tale. Research shows that children's listening comprehension is typically better than

Students do not pre-study the words for the Word Test per se, but they have been working with some of them throughout the unit, and with others in previous units. Any of the words misspelled in the Word Test become their individual spelling words for home and school study.

their reading comprehension (Stricht & James, 1984). When read-alouds are presented in an interactive manner, they are particularly effective in building awareness of the processes and functions of language (Dickinson, 2001). This interactive learning extends to vocabulary work, retelling, and discussion.

The second section of each unit, Build Word Skills, centers on phonemic awareness and phonics routines and practice, including the introduction of several word families. The lessons are designed to complement any kindergarten literacy instruction, but are arranged in a sequence that matches the introduction of letters and sounds through the program's stories and rhymes. The high-frequency words chosen for kindergarten— and indeed for the whole Sitton program—are words children will read and write time and time again. This constant use is the key to mastery. In fact, by the time children have finished just one unit of *Sitton Kindergarten Literacy and Word Skills*, they will be able to read, write, and spell several simple words! This early success is a very powerful motivator.

The third section of each unit, Extend Vocabulary and Background Knowledge, focuses more deeply on the importance of word meaning and crosses the curriculum by deepening knowledge of story-related—and standards-correlated—topics.

The fourth section, Celebrate with Children's Theater, provides a fun and learning-rich opportunity for reinforcing the skills learned earlier in the unit and is a major boon to fluency. Speaking of the power of audience, Levy (2009) says, "Why do students work so hard practicing the same passages over and over, week after week? Because the audience is coming …" (p. 77). Preparing for the theater event provides children with a real reason to practice what they have learned—another powerful motivator.

• The Practice Book is an integral part of *Sitton Kindergarten Literacy and Word Skills*, allowing children who cannot yet read and write well to interact with words at their own level. Appealing story pictures offer strong picture-

text support; simple rhymes give budding readers an opportunity to pretend read and, for some, to really read. Children draw in response, color, circle, connect, write letters, and blend simple words. All provide a record of children's accomplishments that teachers can use to monitor progress and inform instruction.

• Five full-color posters, which match the coloring page illustrations in the Practice Book, provide a springboard for discussion, story support, and an organic way of helping children with such concepts as character, plot, and sequence of events.

The Home-School Connection

Educators, as a rule, view the home-school connection as a desirable component of an effective literacy program (Cooper, 2000; Cunningham, P. et al, 2000). It is important, however, that if parents are asked to provide home support, that they be given the tools they will need with which to participate (Padask, Rasinski, 2006). *Sitton Spelling* seeks to include parents and keeps them informed about what is expected of their children in regard to spelling. Letters are sent home to parents explaining the ways in which they may help their children with take-home tasks, skill building exercises, proofreading papers, and words to learn. One of the parent letters focuses on proofreading, including tips and activities they can do with their children. Priority Word lists accompany this letter and are continually updated. Bear et al (2000) concur that parents should be encouraged to assist with spelling homework as "parents are typically firm believers in the importance of spelling because it is such a visible sign of literacy…" (p. 86).

Spelling Is a Language Art

The section called Relating to Literature, found in Level 1, underscores the basic premise that spelling is a skill that must be viewed in the context of a total language arts literacy program. Appropriate literature and writing experiences as well as follow-up activities help to highlight and expand the skill knowledge the students are learning in the program. Since Priority Words

Sitton Spelling seeks to include parents and keeps them informed about what is expected of their children in regard to spelling.

are high frequency words used repeatedly in reading and writing, immersion in both activities would be the logical reinforcement of the visuo-motor skills researchers such as M. L. Peters (1985, 1991) have found critical to acquiring accurate spelling. So too, literature and writing offers students opportunities to "assimilate new spelling and new vocabulary into memory" (Schlagal and Schlagal, p. 422, 1992) by relating to similar unfamiliar words, understandings about letter patterns (*and, understand*) or meaning based spelling patterns (s*ign, signify*) that they have learned with familiar words. Literature and writing also give continuing context for the additional phonics patterns, punctuation, homophones, vocabulary, affixes, hypothesizing, and other skills students are instructed in throughout the Sourcebooks. Peters' (1985) spelling research through the 1960s to 1970 revealed that spelling ability was best predicted by verbal ability, underscoring the benefits of language enrichment fostered through all of the language arts.

Meeting Common Core Standards for Spelling

Sitton Spelling sets itself apart from other spelling programs with its unique elements that work together to provide students with spelling, language, and word skills to help them become better writers. The Sourcebook-based program allows teachers to choose the perfect match of student to instruction. *Sitton Spelling* blends seamlessly with other elements of a reading and language arts curriculum.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS), Language Anchor Standard 2 for both K–5 and 6–12, says that students should be able to: *"Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing."*

Sitton Spelling was developed to get away from the common "Friday test" spelling programs that are so prevalent in schools. *Sitton Spelling* has a more effective and structured approach. Rather than a "Friday test," students get a formative assessment to guide instruction and identify words they have not yet mastered, as

well as automatic follow-up testing to assess mastery. The words themselves are chosen from the 1,200 highest-frequency words in printed English—the words students will use again and again—words that relate to students' everyday academic writing.

A Real-World Approach

Furthermore, once students have mastered these words, they are *always* held accountable for spelling them correctly, whether on a test, in a class assignment, or on homework—in anything they write. This real-world approach embeds spelling into the entire curriculum and does not present spelling as a separate entity. The CCSS states: *"The inclusion of Language standards in their own strand should not be taken as an indication that skills related to conventions [such as spelling]…are unimportant to reading, writing, speaking, and listening; indeed, they are inseparable from such contexts."*

Building Basic Concepts

Sitton Spelling units always feature a variety of concepts. For example, Level 3 includes instruction in frequent spelling patterns for /a/, /j/, and /o/. As early as grade 1, the CCSS state that students should: *"Use conventional spelling for words with common spelling patterns and for frequently occurring irregular words."*

The same Level teaches about suffixes. The CCSS for Grade 3 say that students should: "*Use conventional spelling for high-frequency and other studied words and for adding suffixes to base words.*"

Because *Sitton Spelling* provides a great deal of flexibility to teachers, it aligns with one of the CCSS's key design considerations: *"Teachers are thus free to provide students with whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful for meeting the goals set out in the Standards."*

For all Standards…

And similarly with the English Language Arts standards that were crafted by the National Council of Teachers of English, in Partnership

with the International Reading Association, which stated *"the conscious process of learning how to learn is an essential element in students language arts education."* (NCTE/IRA 1996, p. 7.) *Sitton Spelling* fits well.

Each unit of the *Sitton Spelling* Sourcebook provides instruction in visual and proofreading skills, as well as critical thinking skills (exercised through collection and analysis of words) needed to promote the discovery of spelling skills and concepts. The Sourcebooks not only provide instruction but also do so with immediate application in written work.

Conclusion

It is the teacher who is the key to a successful spelling program. *Sitton Spelling* assures success. This program recognizes that spelling is a skill that is acquired developmentally (Bear and Templeton, 1998; Bear et al 2000; Ehri, 1997) and that instruction must be developmentally rather than age or grade appropriate (Templeton and Morris, 1999). The Sourcebooks offer the teacher direct, explicit guidance for multilevel skill building instruction for differentiated groupings or teaching configurations. Evaluation both informal and formal is a part of every unit and informs the teacher as to which activities and skills are needed for every student. Teaching and evaluation of Core Words and skills recycle continually through each level allowing students to achieve mastery when they are developmentally ready. Pages of written instructions to the teacher are included for students with "special" needs at both ends so there need be no lack of challenge for the able or frustration for the slower learner. Explicit instruction and material is provided to the teacher for parent involvement. Students using *Sitton Spelling* have every reason to become "lifelong spellers."

For more information about this and other research-based materials from EPS Literacy and Intervention, visit epsbooks.com or call 800.225.5750.

Rebecca Sitton is the author of the popular *Sitton Spelling and Word Skills* and *Sitton Kindergarten Literacy and Word Skills* programs. She began her career as a teacher in Oregon. Sitton was involved with regular education, special education, and curriculum and staff development.

In support of her spelling program, Sitton has traveled around the country giving seminars on spelling instruction. During her travels, she talks with classroom practitioners, keeping current on classroom issues and the needs of teachers and students. Sitton has developed a stellar reputation as a spelling authority. She was the spelling instructor for the Bureau of Education and Research for many years.

Sitton has also published language arts and spelling materials for preschool to adult students, covering both regular and special education needs.

Sitton holds degrees in Speech Pathology-Audiology and Education, an M.A. in Special Education, and certificates in Extreme Learning Problems, Early Childhood Education, and School Administration.

Beth G. Davis began her career as an elementary school teacher. She has been a Title 1 Evaluator, instructed tutors for School Volunteers for Boston, and has been a presenter at the Massachusetts Reading Association. She is the co-author of *Elementary Reading: Strategies That Work* (Allyn and Bacon, l996) and the author of the *Reteach and Practice Teacher Guides for EPS Phonics PLUS* (Educators Publishing Service, 2006).

Davis is an Emerita Lecturer from Brandeis University, where she taught students from both Brandeis and Wellesley College for nearly 30 years. She received her BA from Smith College and her M.Ed. in Reading from Boston College, where she also taught.

References

Adams, M. (1991). *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press

Allred, R.(1984). *Spelling Trends, Content, and Methods. What Research says to the Teachers.* Washington, DC: National Education Association

Bear, D.R. and Templeton, S. (1998). Explorations in developmental spelling: Foundations for learning and teaching phonics, spelling, and vocabulary. *The Reading Teacher.* 52, pp. 222-242.

Bear, Donald R., Marcia Invernizzi, Shane Templeton, and Francine Johnston (2000). Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall

California Department of Education (1997). English-Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools. http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/engmain.asp

Colorado Department of Education (1995). www.cde.state.co.us/artemis/ed1/ED1202R341995INTERNET

Cooper, J. D. (2000). Literacy: Helping Children Construct Meaning. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Dickinson, D. (2001). Book reading in preschool classrooms: Is recommended practice common? In D. K. Dickinson & P. O. Tabors (eds.), *Building literacy with language: Young children learning at home and school* (pp. 175–203). Baltimore: Brookes.

Cunningham, P., Moore, S., Cunningham J., and Moore, D. (2000). *Reading and Writing in Elementary Classrooms: Strategies and Observations.* New York: Longman

1992 Ehri, L. C. Review and commentary: Stages of spelling development. In S. Templeton & D. Bear (Eds.), *Development of Orthographic Knowledge and the Foundations of Literacy: A Memorial Festschrift for Edmund H. Henderson* (pp. 307-332). Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum.

Ehri, L. C. (1997). Learning to read and learning to spell are one and the same, almost. In C. Perfetti, L. Rieban and, & M. Fatol (Eds.), *Learning to spell: Research, theory, and practice across the languages* (pp. 237-269), Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Griffith, P. and Leavell, J. (1995). There isn't much to say about spelling … or is there? *Childhood Education*, 72, pp.84- 90.

Funnell, Elaine (1992). On recognizing misspelled words. In Sterling and Robson (ed.) *Psychology, Spelling and Education.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd., pp. 86-99.

Horn, T.D. (1969). Spelling. In R.L. Ebel (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of educational research* (4th ed., pp. 1282-1299). New York: Macmillan

Levy, Steven (2009). The Power of Audience. *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development*, 66, pp. 75–79.

Massachusetts Department of Education (2001). Massachusetts English Language Arts Curriculum Framework. http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/ela/0601.pdf

National Council of Teachers of English (1996). Standards for the English Language Arts. www.ncte.org/about/over/standards.

Ohio Department of Education (2001). English Language Arts Academic Content Standards. www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDe... - 51k

Padak, N. and Rasinski, T. (2006). Home-school partnerships in literacy education: From rhetoric to reality. *The Reading Teacher*, 60, pp. 292-295.

Peters, M. L. (1992). Toward spelling autonomy. In Sterling and Robson (ed.) *Psychology, Spelling and Education*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd., pp. 220-23.

Peters, M. L. (1985). *Spelling: Caught or Taught? A New Look*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Rasinski, Timothy, & William H. Rupley, William Dee Nichols (2008). Two Essential Ingredients: Phonics and Fluency Getting to Know Each Other. *The Reading Teacher*, 62(3), pp. 257–260.

Samuels, S. J. (1979). The method of repeated readings. *The Reading Teacher*, 32, 403-408.

Schlagal, B. and Trathen, W. (1998) American Spelling Instruction: What history tells us. *American Reading Forum Online Yearbook*, 18. http://www.americanreadingforum.org

Schlagal, R. C. and Schlagal, J. H. (1992). The integral character of spelling: teaching strategies for multiple purposes. *Language Arts*, 69, pp. 418-25

Sipe, L. (2002). Talking back and taking over: Young children's expressive engagement during storybook read-alouds. *Reading Teacher*, 55, 476–483.

Sipe, Rebecca (2003). *They Still Can't Spell? Understanding and Supporting Challenged Spellers in Middle and High School*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Spiegel, Dixie Lee (1992). Blending whole language and systematic instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 46, pp. 38-44.

Sticht, T.G., & James, J.H. (1984) Listening and Reading. In P.D. Pearson (Ed), *Handbook of Reading Research*, (pp. 293-317). NY: Longman.

Templeton, S. and Morris, D. (1999). Theory and Research into Practice: Questions teachers ask about spelling. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 34, pp. 102-112.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wilde, S. (1990). A proposal for a new spelling curriculum. *The Elementary School Journal*, 90, pp. 275-290.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (1998). English Language Arts-Standard B-Performance Standards. http://dpi.state.wi.us/standards/elasamp.html

Zutell, J. (1990). In Jongsma, K.S. Reading-spelling links. *The Reading Teacher*, 43, pp. 608-610.

Zutell, J. (1996). The Directed Spelling Thinking Activity: Providing an effective balance in word study instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 50, pp. 98-108.