

SPELLING at HARRISON SCHOOL

Often parents ask how spelling is taught at Harrison School. Parents tend to ask about phonics, spelling lists and spellings tests. Hopefully this and the link to the article below will answer some of your questions.

Effective spellers do not spell every word correctly, but they do possess more strategies for generating, checking and modifying spelling of words (research by Westwood, 2005). These strategies are an important part of our spelling program.

One strategy that is taught is using spelling generalisations. There are over 200 spelling rules we could teach students but the majority of them have less than 50% reliability. The unreliability of these rules can make spelling confusing for students. Those that are more reliable are taught but we call them spelling generalisations as they may not work every time. Spelling generalisations are carefully selected based on their reliability.

Learning to spell is not just about learning a list of words and writing them in sentences. If this was the only way we taught spelling consider the maths...20 words a week, 40 weeks of school a year, 13 years of formal schooling would equate to 10400 words learnt. The Oxford dictionary suggests there are more than a quarter of a million distinct English words, that number does not include inflections, technical and regional vocabulary yet we only get through 10400 words using this method. This method is flawed not only because we could never get through all the words but also because the words are out of context; they have no meaning attached to them and students who learn spelling using only this method alone don't understand how to transfer their spelling knowledge to other words.

English language is predominantly meaning based and as a result our spelling programs focus on morphemes, the meaning parts of words. For example the word 'definite' is commonly misspelt. If students understand that 'definite' comes from the word 'finite' it can remind them to use an 'i' rather than an 'a' (definate).

Another way we teach spelling is exploration of etymology. Where a word comes from, its derivation, is a powerful teaching method that helps students remember spelling because they suddenly have reasons for the unusual letter combinations or an answer to why the word cannot be phonetically 'sounded out'.

Phonics is taught at Harrison School through the use of rich literature. Students participate in word study, locating sounds in words, looking for various letter combinations that make the same sound, discussing and exploring words and so on. Did you know the /f/ sound can be heard using many letter combinations? **Coffee**, **fish**, **phone**, **laugh**. Your children will be discovering this through word investigation; they will be code breaking to discover how the English language and all its nuances work.

All this learning occurs through the use of rich text, all this learning is taught in context. Teachers support students to make links between what they discover about one word and how that will help them spell other words.

Does this mean that your child will never have to look, cover, write, check again? No, it means that any words your child learns have come from a meaning based experience. This may include their own writing, the literature they are reading with their teacher, the scientific vocabulary they are using as part of their research and so on.

I've chosen to focus on these elements of our spelling program because I read an article written by Misty Adoniou (Senior Lecturer in Language, Literacy and Teaching English as a Second Language at the University of Canberra) in The New Age this week. Misty has been working at Harrison School throughout 2013 as part of an action research project and provided whole school professional learning in 2012. Her article can be found at the following link.

<http://thenewdaily.com.au/life/2013/11/26/spelling-tests-dont-help-kids/>

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If you would like more information about spelling at Harrison School please don't hesitate to email me, jodie.rowell@ed.act.edu.au.

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