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## FINGER SPELLING

**WHAT IS IT AND  
WHY DOES IT  
GIVE SUCCESS?**

Finger spelling is a manual form of communication most commonly used by deaf people. Each letter of the alphabet is represented by a different finger formation. Words are spelt using the various hand and finger formations letter-by-letter.

I became aware of the possibility of "finger spelling" as a spelling aid for hearing children whilst interacting with a deaf friend.

When introduced to an unfamiliar sign, she would ask for the word to be fingerspelt, emphasising the importance of spelling it correctly from the initial introduction.

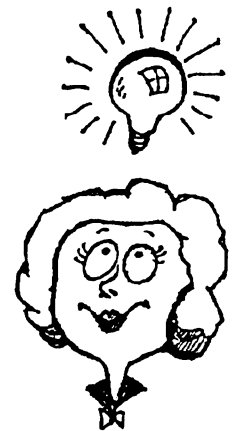
If she recorded the incorrect finger spelling pattern on her hands, she would continue to fingerspell the word in that manner in the future and consequently spell it incorrectly when using the word in the written context.

This notion of remembering a motoric pattern was reinforced by my involvement in interpreting for deaf people.

Any incorrect finger spelling I made in the interpreting situation became instantly apparent because letter patterns and combinations not found in our English language felt wrong motorically on the hands keeping in mind there had been much practice with the correct patterns previously.

This background of involvement with deaf children and adults, coupled with the challenge of teaching a group of children with dysphasia to read and spell, but who had failed to do so through the normal phonic and visual strategies led me to devise this method.

A literature research on spelling difficulties/finger spelling has given additional credence to the value of this non-traditional approach.



Children who will benefit from learning the finger spelling technique fall broadly into five groups :

- Those children experiencing spelling failure or difficulty, or labelled as language disordered, learning disabled, dyslexic or intellectually impaired.
- Children with reading difficulties will benefit from the extra support of finger spelling used in conjunction with their reading programme.
- Children not experiencing any particular spelling difficulty will find added stimulation and learning motivation with finger spelling.
- Gifted children will experience a challenge to their cognitive skills when required to "read" someone else finger spelling words or sentences to them.
- Schools can incorporate this new approach across the curriculum. This provides a motivational instructional tool as well as helping under-achieving spellers without singling them out for special instruction.

Such a decision has been made by Studfield East Primary School in Melbourne, Victoria. This is currently the host school to the Language Unit where this spelling approach was developed.

After witnessing the success achieved by finger spelling with children from the Language Unit, teachers from mainstream classrooms employed the approach with non-unit children who were under-achieving in spelling. Similar success was experienced.

Because of the motivation by teachers and students to use this technique, this usage has now been extended to include all children in the school population.

Fingerspelling is also a valuable resource for :

- end of session fill-ins,
- cross age tutoring,
- English as Second Language classes,
- parent-student activity sessions

**WHO WILL  
BENEFIT FROM  
THE FINGER  
SPELLING  
APPROACH?**

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**INTRODUCTION**

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***A NEW  
APPROACH  
TO  
SPELLING  
DIFFICULTIES***

This is a new, step-by-step approach to spelling and was developed as a result of my work with dysphasic children.

Dysphasia is a specific speech and language disorder caused by some defect in the central nervous system.

Due to the nature of the disorder, these children find the acquisition and then utilisation of phonic skills very difficult.

Although these children possess strong compensatory visual skills the "look, read, cover, spell, check" method was not sufficient in itself in developing their spelling skills.

The methodology proposed incorporates aspects of the "look, read, cover, spell check" system with the cue and support of "finger spelling".