

# From the President

## Anne Castles

In this issue, we focus on spelling. I'm very pleased about this, because spelling often feels like the "poor cousin" of reading. The processes involved in learning to spell have not received anything like the degree of research attention as those involved in learning to read, and spelling difficulties do not attract the same level of concern from teachers, parents, and clinicians as do difficulties in reading.

Why might this be the case? One widespread impression seems to be that a spelling problem is easily dealt with – just use the spell checker! But, as we well know, the spell checker doesn't fix the many spelling errors that involve producing another correctly spelled word (for example, the ubiquitous their/there confusion). There also seems to be a sense that being a poor speller is just an annoyance rather than a condition that will affect a child's future or their access to knowledge, education or employment. But this is not so. To cite just one example, in a 1991 article in *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, researchers Robert Schramm and Neil Dortch report on a survey of 142 recruiters from a range of companies. The recruiters were asked about the aspects of resumes that influenced their interest in interviewing a prospective employee. Over 90% of the recruiters responded that a resume with more than one spelling error would lead them to be disinterested in a candidate. Acquiring basic spelling and writing skills is important, and arguably more so in our modern era of texting, tweeting, and social media.

Another reason that spelling is important is that knowing the precise spellings of words helps people to read them. In research reported in *Scientific Studies of Reading* in 2017, Gene Ouellette and colleagues trained

undergraduate students to improve their spelling of difficult words. The students' word reading speed was then measured for these same words. The researchers found that the words that improved in spelling accuracy were subsequently read more rapidly than the words that did not show improvement, providing direct evidence that the quality of orthographic representations, as indexed by spelling, is causally related to reading efficiency. Findings such as this have important implications for the remediation of both reading and spelling difficulties: we must remember not to overlook spelling interventions as a potentially valuable component of our toolkit when working with children with learning difficulties.

Reading and spelling are closely linked, but also draw on different skills and processes. At the most basic level, spelling is a production task while reading is one of recognition. That there are differences in the demands of reading and spelling is evident from the existence of a small but distinct group of individuals who are unexpectedly poor spellers: their reading falls within the normal range, but they fall well below average on measures of spelling. By closely studying children who show this profile, we can learn more about which skills are common across reading and spelling, and which skills are distinct.

I hope that you find the articles in this issue illuminating and informative, and I further hope that this focus on spelling will stimulate more interest in, and attention to, this important domain of learning.

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