



# SOUND SPELLING...



*Thinking about spelling from  
a sound perspective.*

## SOUNDS AND LETTER NAMES

One teacher of Prep grade said to me that she had two children in her class who were stumped on learning the sounds that went with some of the letters. These particular kids could name all the letters of the alphabet on starting school and had eagerly commenced on learning the letter-sound links. The teacher said that they were grasping most of this well, but with *some* letters, they just couldn't seem to learn the sound link. The bizarre thing was that both kids were making the same strange errors...

When the teacher talked me through her observations, she was able to give me the following examples. To me, it was quite clear what these children were doing. See if you can work it out...

- The children had easily and correctly learnt the sounds that commonly went with the letters **b,d,j,k,p** and **t**.
- The children had learnt that the letter **c** made a /sssss/ sound (as in city) and that the letter **g** made a /j/ sound (as in giant). That is, for these letters, they had learnt a correct, but less common sound link.
- The final observation, the teacher felt, was the most strange... The children were stuck on the letters **m, n** and **f** (amongst others), thinking that they all said the sound /e/ (as in egg).

### The final example was the clincher.

At this point, I asked the teacher whether they were saying that the letter **y** said /w/ (as in wine).

“Yes!” she said.

This error is not uncommon for young children who have learnt their letter names but then who, incorrectly, generate their own rule that the sound linked to a letter is the first sound in the letter's name. This will work sometimes (eg. as in b,d,t,k,p,v, ) but not always. These students will appear to be learning letter-sound links well ... up to a certain point.

**To overcome this problem, it is necessary for a teacher to be able to recognise when this pattern is occurring and to tackle it early. Carefully explain that the letter's first name isn't always the same as the sound it makes, but be sure to do this using language the child understands. Give lots of examples.**

This is why I like to use the Speech Sound Set (from Pelican Talk) as it really reinforces the difference between sounds and letters. Sounds are learnt using mouthshapes, stories and hand cues and then linked to letters.

Above you will see Nosey Nick. His letter name is n (en) and his sound is /nnnnnnn/.

Babbling Barry's letter name is b (bee) and his sound is /b/.

You can see the starting position for each sound by looking at the characters' mouths.