

THRASS®

TEACHING HANDWRITING READING AND SPELLING SKILLS

THE PHONOGRAPHIC FRAMEWORK FOR WORD LEVEL TEACHING

TEACHING WHOLE-PICTURE KEYWORD PHONICS



TEACHING HANDWRITING READING AND SPELLING SKILLS



INFORMATION PACKAGE

FOR PRE-SCHOOLS, SCHOOLS, COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

INTRODUCTION TO THRASS

THRASS (Teaching Handwriting Reading And Spelling Skills), is a phoneme-grapheme awareness teaching method, that uses a phonographic, multisensory, approach. THRASS represents a unique, linguistically sound approach to phonics teaching at the Word Level. The basis of the THRASS philosophy and methodology was initially conceived by Alan Davies, an English educational psychologist, former teacher and teacher trainer. In 1995, Alan was joined in the venture by Denyse Ritchie, a Western Australian teacher, teacher trainer and author. Together they have developed the THRASS Professional Development Course outlines and created the current list of THRASS teaching materials.

LITERACY TEACHING AND THRASS

If you are proficient at reading, spelling, writing, speaking and listening in a language you are said to be literate in that language. All levels of literacy teaching should require teachers to teach the skills associated with reading, spelling, writing, speaking and listening.

WORD LEVEL TEACHING

When teachers teach children or adults to read, write, spell, speak and listen in a language, it is called literacy teaching. Literacy teaching for alphabetic languages like English, has three levels - Word Level, Sentence Level and Text Level. The building blocks of Word Level teaching are the phonemes (speech sounds) of the spoken language and the graphemes (spelling choices) of the written language. The building blocks of Sentence Level teaching are the spoken and written words of the language. The building blocks of Text Level teaching are the spoken and written sentences of the language. THRASS has been designed to assist teachers with Word Level Teaching.

THRASS AS A STARTING POINT OR REMEDIAL PROGRAM

THRASS is an approach that can be implemented right from the very beginning of schooling and in the home environment prior to the commencement of formal learning. By using it from the start of the literacy process, we can avoid reading, spelling and handwriting problems before they emerge. Alternatively, it may be used successfully as a remedial program.

THRASS AS PART OF THE TOTAL LITERACY PROGRAM

While THRASS concentrates on Word Level work it recognises the vital importance of the other two levels and should be viewed as one part of the structured approach to reading and spelling. Additionally, it should be emphasised that the quality of THRASS teaching outcomes depends, firstly, on teachers receiving THRASS Accredited Professional Development Training and, secondly, on how THRASS is incorporated into a balanced literacy program.

WHY CHANGE? PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH CONVENTIONAL PHONICS TEACHING

Note: Letter names are indicated by apostrophes e.g. the letter 'a' and phonemes (speech sounds) by brackets [].

Traditionally, schools that have included a phonic component in their English program, begin by using a strategy commonly referred to as the phonic/initial sounds method. THRASS calls this OLMOSM (one-letter-makes-one-sound-method).

With OLMOSM learners are introduced to two basic concepts. Firstly, they are taught that the lower-case letters of the alphabet have a sound. For example the letter 'a' is given [æ], as in ant and so on. However, when we come to read a word like baby the letter 'a' isn't making [æ] as in ant, but is representing the phoneme [eɪ], as heard in words such as tape, snail and tray. Similarly with words such as what and was, the letter 'a' represents the phoneme [ɒ], as heard in words such as frog and swan. Then in words such as ball and water the letter 'a' represents the phoneme [ɔ:] as in door, more and for. Apart from being inconsistent and illogical, this concept only exposes the learner to 23 of the 44 phonemes of spoken English. Secondly, at the same time as we teach that the lower-case letters have a sound, we introduce the capital letters by name: A, B, C, D, E, etc. Unfortunately, many learners actually work very hard at mastering these two concepts, believing them to be the way one learns to read and spell in English. Examples of the rigid adherence to this belief can be observed in their spelling choices. For example, they will frequently misspell words such as baby - bAbE, again - agen, car - cR, farm - fRm, street - strEt, said - sed, is - iz, was - woz, come - cum, many - meny, all choices that show good phonemic awareness but poor graphemic awareness.

Sadly, in a sense, the learners are displaying the 'right behaviour' because they have logically applied the two concepts. These spelling choices demonstrate a lack of understanding of the phoneme-grapheme principle, (an understanding that the 44 speech sounds of spoken English may be represented by various graphs, digraphs, trigraphs). In summary, OLMOSM only enables learners to decode (read) and encode (spell) words that contain certain graphs, and then only those graphs that represent the phonemes that have been associated with a specific lower-case letter, for example words like cat, dog, sit, pet, mug, etc.





A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE THRASS PHILOSOPHY AND METHODOLOGY

- At THRASS, we believe that many children who fail at reading and spelling do so because they have been confused right from the beginning of their formal schooling, by the deficiencies of conventional phonics teaching. In addition, many current remedial programs/strategies, continue to deliver further doses of OLMOSM, unfortunately reinforcing the wrong message. Children exposed to OLMOSM, who don't overthrow this method, are caught in what is commonly termed the 'literacy net'. THRASS believes that one way to get them out, is to start by explicitly teaching the building blocks of our language.
- THRASS says that reading and spelling difficulties occur because learners are not taught, from the very beginning, the various relationships between speech sounds (phonemes) and spelling choices (graphemes).
- THRASS is a method that helps learners understand the relationships between the 44 phonemes of spoken English, and the 26 letters of the alphabet. THRASS believes in giving learners the 'whole picture' right from the very beginning - that is, in English we speak 44 phonemes but there are only 26 letters in our alphabet, therefore there must be different grapheme choices for these phonemes.
- THRASS teaches learners about the 'Phoneme-Grapheme Principle'. This principle states that the 44 speech sounds (phonemes) of spoken English may be represented by different letters and different combinations of letters. THRASS explicitly teaches these phonemes and graphemes.
- THRASS works from the big picture to the smaller picture. Many learners, when exposed to OLMOSM, become confused about letter sounds (letters in English do not have sounds) and letter names. As mentioned earlier, the limitations of OLMOSM are evident in the misspellings of emergent spellers. These examples show that the learner's awareness of phonemes is good, but it is a limited awareness of graphemes that is causing the incorrect visual image and, hence, the incorrect spelling. Unless learners have a conscious/unconscious understanding for phonemes and graphemes they will continue to have difficulties with reading and spelling.
- Throughout THRASS, emphasis is placed on developing the learner's phonemic/graphemic awareness with additional emphasis on graphemic awareness. The problem for many learners is not poor phonemic awareness but poor graphemic awareness. That is, they are generally able to hear phonemes in words but don't have a large enough range of spelling choices, because they have never been explicitly taught all 44 phonemes and their associated grapheme choices.
- THRASS is an explicit teaching method that focuses on helping learners gain a logical understanding for the building blocks of literacy through:
 - an awareness of the 44 phonemes of spoken English and the associated grapheme choices
 - an awareness for graphs, digraphs, trigraphs
 - knowledge of the alphabet, and the naming of the lower-case letters and their capitals
 - using correct terminology from the very beginning e.g. letter/s, letter name/s, lower-case, capital, phoneme, grapheme, graph, digraph, trigraph, grapheme, word
 - an awareness that the alphabet is a resource from which letters are selected to represent the phonemes of spoken English
 - learning handwriting skills - the correct formation of the lower-case and capital letters
- THRASS reduces reading, spelling and handwriting to their basics. That is:
 - reading involves changing graphemes (spelling choices) to phonemes (speech sounds) $R = G \rightarrow P$
 - spelling involves changing phonemes (speech sounds) to graphemes (spelling choices) $S = P \rightarrow G$
 - handwriting involves drawing lower-case and capital letters using the correct procedures.

THRASS IN SUMMARY

The following information is designed to give the reader a brief overview of THRASS. It should in no way be seen as a substitute for the more extensive and varied content covered in the THRASS Accredited Certificate Course (two days of training) or the more specific written information provided in the THRASS Teacher's Manual.

- THRASS is an acronym for **Teaching Handwriting Reading And Spelling Skills**.
- THRASS is a **multisensory, phoneme-grapheme awareness program**, that may be used to prevent and correct literacy problems. THRASS is not just for learners with literacy difficulties. It is a method that can be taught right from the very beginning of the literacy process to eliminate spelling and reading difficulties before they emerge.
- THRASS uses a **phonographic approach, to teach the building blocks of literacy**, that is, the 44 phonemes (speech sounds) of spoken English and the graphemes (spelling choices) of written English.
- THRASS gives learners the **whole-picture of English from the beginning**, that is, there are 44 phonemes in spoken English but only 26 letters in the alphabet, therefore there are different grapheme choices for the phonemes in words. Learners then work from the 'big picture' to 'smaller pictures'.
- THRASS is an **explicit teaching program operating at the word level**. The building blocks of word level teaching are the phonemes (speech sounds) of the spoken language. THRASS teaches the realities of our language's phoneme/grapheme relationships, patterns and orthographics.
- THRASS is not 'the' program but part of the total language program.
- THRASS in no way precludes a whole language approach.
- THRASS provides a **skill base for teachers and learners**, empowering them with a solid understanding of the English language and the ability to take command of their own teaching/learning.
- THRASS is most effective as a **whole-school program**, but can be used effectively in small groups or individually.
- THRASS does not require the learner to grasp a new set of rules (or the old set for that matter), diacritical markings or hand signals etc. Inconsistent and misleading rules/information such as *fairy 'e'*, *silent letters* and so called '*sight words*', become a thing of the past when you start using THRASS.
- THRASS can be used with children of all ages, adults and ESL students.
- THRASS can be taught by teachers, teacher aides, speech pathologists and parents.

The THRASS Teacher's Manual provides a complete overview of the THRASS philosophy and methodology. There is also a complete range of THRASS products including charts, multimedia and books. Details of these appear in the latest THRASS catalogue.



For more information about teaching materials, accredited professional development courses, or other aspects of THRASS, please visit our website or contact our office.

The Training section of the website lists worldwide evaluations from teachers who have attended previous courses and the Library section has articles of interest. There are also links for Course Dates, Free Reading & Spelling Tests, Free School Diary Charts and THRASSNET (“The worldwide forum for questions, information, comments and replies about THRASS”).

INFORMATION PACKAGE

In the THRASS Information Package you should have this written information and a copy of the current THRASS catalogue. Further information, on THRASS Accredited Professional Development Courses and THRASS Teaching Materials, can be obtained by visiting our website or contacting our office.

Professional Development

It is highly recommended that teachers thinking of implementing THRASS attend a THRASS Accredited Professional Development Course. These courses are run on a regular basis using our qualified trainers. Courses are listed on the THRASS website under the Training section (evaluations of previous courses can also be found there), and they are also advertised to schools via post and/or relevant publications. Alternatively, if you are interested in hosting a course in your area/school or having your whole staff in-serviced, please contact THRASS for a set of costing guidelines.

Teaching Materials

The enclosed catalogue lists the numerous and varied THRASS teaching materials, including the THRASS Teacher's Manual. The manual provides a complete overview of the THRASS philosophy and methodology, as well as thoroughly explaining the various sections within the THRASS Resource File. Other products include charts, multimedia, books and games.

THE PHONOGRAPHIC FRAMEWORK FOR WORD LEVEL TEACHING

THRASS is a method, for teaching children and adults, about the building blocks of reading and spelling, that is, the 44 phonemes (speech sounds) of spoken English and the graphemes (spelling choices) of written English.

In classrooms, the THRASS PICTURECHART and related THRASS GRAPHEMECHART provide concrete whole-picture focal points for Word Level work, that is, work related to the 44 phonemes (speech sounds) and the graphs (one-letter-spelling-choices), digraphs (two-letter-spelling-choices) and trigraphs (three-letter-spelling-choices) of English.

For example, the speech sound heard at the start of the word jam, as illustrated below, may be spelled as 'j', 'g', 'g'e' or 'd'g'e', as in such basic words as jam, giant, cage, and bridge.



THRASS will help you to teach children that, basically, when reading we change spelling choices to speech sounds and when spelling we change speech sounds to spelling choices.

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