

How should we be teaching spelling in lower Key Stage 2?

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Aim of the study

- To find which particular teaching strategy has the most positive impact on helping lower Key Stage 2 children to spell.

What is meant by spelling?

The formation of words through the sequential and meaningful arrangements of letters.

-Mercer and Mercer, 1989

Historically, it was believed that spelling was a skill that occurred incidentally or is 'caught' from reading but from the 1980s there was a shift in attitudes when teachers started to appeal for help in the teaching of spellings (Peters, 1985).

Are teachers equipped to teach spelling?

- ❑ In 1990, Brown claimed there had been a vigorous but fragmented growth of research into the instruction of spelling however a unified approach to spelling instruction remained illusive.
- ❑ Graham et al found similar results in 2008 and claimed there is a remarkable variety in approaches to teaching spelling and quite often a neglect to the needs of poor spellers.
- ❑ The Education Endowment Foundation (2016) claimed that some approaches to teaching spelling do have some evidence to support them, especially when evaluated on the basis of spelling individual words. However, it is less clear which approaches lead to better spellings in children's independent composition of longer pieces of texts.
- ❑ For teachers within the UK, 'rules and guidance' are offered by the Department for Education (DfE) within the National Curriculum (2014). They explain how once pupils have learnt more than one way of representing a particular sound, they then need to choose the correct letters and this will depend on them having made a conscious effort to learn the spelling or have absorbed them through reading. The DfE provide statutory word-lists that children in Years 3- 6 must be taught how to spell but, offer no guidance in the framework of the delivery of this instruction.

Previous Research

- ❑ There is extensive research and literature available to refer to when trying to find the most appropriate way to support children with learning spelling.
- ❑ Past literature indicates a positive impact on children's learning of spellings can be made by some teaching approaches.
- ❑ There are some claims though that some of these approaches are not beneficial (Gentry, 2011).
- ❑ Adoniou (2013) has argued that activities to memorise spellings are pointless and compares them to learning 7-digit numbers off by heart and that words are not just strings of letters to be memorised. She also goes on to point out that weekly tests do not encourage children to monitor their own spelling in their writing

Context

In light of the conflicting research, this study aims to clear up misconceptions that are held about spelling instruction and to find a strategy which is effective in teaching children how to spell.

- ❑ Sample – 61 lower Key Stage 2 children (31 Year 3s, 30 Year 4s)
- ❑ Tested weekly on spelling of 10 words developed for their year group by spelling scheme.
- ❑ Taught for 2 weeks using one of 4 different strategies
- ❑ School – Ex mining town in East Midlands.
- ❑ Majority of pupils White-British origin with English as their first language.

Cognitive approach



Self-correction



The 4
teaching
strategies

Etymology



Precision Teaching



Cognitive approach

Cognitive strategies is the use of the mind to solve a problem or complete a task (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1987).



Self-correction

Children correct their own spelling errors one letter at a time, (McNeish, Heron Okyere, 1992).



The 4 teaching strategies



Etymology

The study of the origin of words and the way in which their meanings have changed throughout history, (Quigley, A, 2014);



Precision Teaching

The key focus is the promotion of fluency and automaticity, (West, Young, Spooner, 1990);

Methodology

- ❑ Mixed methods
- ❑ Critical Realist approach – realist and constructivist perspectives taken.
- ❑ Positivist and Interpretivist stance – measurement by tests, childrens' and teachers views.
- ❑ Both qualitative and quantitative data gathered.
- ❑ Each teaching strategy was delivered to the best of the teachers' abilities in order to minimise any potential impact of the research findings on the future chosen teaching strategies to help children learn spellings.

Research Findings

Quantitative data

An ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) test was ran on the spelling scores collected. Each set of scores were compared against each other and the ANOVA was used to find if there were any statistically significant differences.

- ❑ No significant difference between the strategies.
- ❑ However – significant difference between no teaching approach and Etymology. In favour of ‘no teaching approach!’

Strategy	Mean score
No additional teaching instruction	8.04
Cognitive approach	7.14
Precision Teaching	7.15
Self-correction	7.11
Etymology	6.52

Mean score for each strategy across both year groups.

	Cognitive Approach	Precision Teaching	Self-correction	Etymology
Year 3	9	8	10	5
Year 4	7	9	12	8
Overall	16	17	22	13

Number of children who scored more highly than with no additional instruction

- Overall the strategy which appears to have helped the smallest number of children to increase their spelling scores was the use of Etymology and the highest is the Self-correction approach.
- For Year 3, the Etymology approach resulted in the **lowest** improvement of scores. For Year 4, it was the Cognitive Approach.
- For **both** Years 3 and 4 the Self-Correction approach resulted in the **highest** improvement of scores.

	Cognitive Approach	Precision Teaching	Self-correction	Etymology
Year 3	2.76	2.03	2.1	3.1
Year 4	2.92	2.28	1.96	2.84
Overall	5.68	4.31	4.06	5.94

Mean score given by children to each strategy for which one helped them learn their spellings the most.

- The children ranked the strategies from 1 to 4. 1 being the **most** helpful and 4 being the **least** helpful.
- Overall Self-Correction helped them to learn the spellings the most.
- Year 3 children preferred Precision Teaching. The Year 4 children however, preferred self-correction.
- Overall Etymology was scored the least helpful.
- The Year 3 children found Etymology the least helpful strategy. Year 4 children found the Cognitive Approach the least helpful. Reflected in test scores.

Qualitative Data -



CHILDREN'S VIEWS

- ❑ *"I don't like this because it's hard and I don't understand it."*
- ❑ *"comefoosing"*
- ❑ *"I liked how it split the words in half like bicycle and that helped me"*

TEACHERS' VIEWS

- ❑ Some of the children didn't understand the meaning of the word in English so showing them the Latin or German origin confused them further.
- ❑ Word lists used for the spelling tests came from a scheme following spelling 'patterns' each week, many of the words in a list therefore shared the same prefix making the etymology task redundant.

Qualitative Data -



CHILDREN'S VIEWS

- *"I like that when I got a letter rong I know which letter to improve on."*

TEACHERS' VIEWS

- 'Both precision teaching and self-correction were most beneficial, but the children didn't self-correct accurately.'
- 'Precision teaching and the self-correction method were more sustainable as they required less preparation of resources and were therefore less time consuming.'

Qualitative Data -



CHILDREN'S VIEWS

- *"It helps me do it faster"*

TEACHERS' VIEWS

- The children seemed to have more fun when completing the precision teaching activities.

Qualitative Data -



CHILDREN'S VIEWS

❑ *"I don't like this one because it gets messy."*

TEACHERS' VIEWS

❑ "Time consuming to prepare."

‘Which teaching strategies are the most beneficial for improving lower Key Stage 2 children’s learning of spelling?’

- ❑ As children get older and develop their learning strategies as well as meet new vocabulary the approach in which to teach them spelling must evolve to accommodate this learning and ability.
- ❑ Also, the words which children are tasked to learn to spell should be dependent on their developmental processing stage.
- ❑ Self-correction resulted in the largest number of children improving their spelling score overall.
- ❑ Etymology had a significantly negative impact on the performance of spellers.
- ❑ There were only 11 children in Year 3 compared to 21 in Year 4 who scored the same or higher following the Etymology approach. Therefore the benefit of this teaching strategy, was far greater for the older children in the study. This reflects Bear and Templeton’s (1998) claim that Etymology is beneficial when children are at an advanced stage of development of reading and writing.
- ❑ The teaching strategy which is used is important but not as important as placing children at the correct level of difficulty (Morris et al, 1995).

Further Recommendations

- ❑ Investigate if different strategies are more beneficial to different age groups.
- ❑ Consider how the words are chosen for the list being tested.
- ❑ How well children retain the learning they have achieved following different teaching strategies would build upon the findings from this study.