

Spelling Remediation for Lower Primary Students

Students who experience difficulties with spelling may struggle to accurately represent all the precise sounds within words, confuse the sequence of letters, have difficulty retaining learnt spelling patterns over the long term, and have problems transferring this knowledge to their writing. They often use inefficient visual strategies, such as relying on visual memory to recall spellings, and this often results in incorrectly sequenced or missing letters. Just like reading, improving spelling is not something that “just happens”. A structured, systematic, and intensive program is needed focussing on the acquisition of skills in six core areas (as detailed below).

It is important that any literacy intervention undertaken focuses on the development of both reading and spelling skills.

1. Phonological Awareness

- Spelling words should be introduced by listening to the word (e.g., parent or teacher reads spelling words aloud) before the student even sees the word. This will encourage the student to focus on the sounds in words which can then be mapped to their letters and letter patterns rather than emphasising only the visual features of the word.
- When introducing new spelling words, students should be encouraged to identify key aspects of the word's phonological structure before they are shown the word (e.g., How many syllables? What is the first sound? What is the last sound? etc.) (see Phonological Awareness tip sheet).

2. Phonics Knowledge

- Children need to understand that speech sounds (phonemes) are represented by one or more letters (graphemes), and that when we spell we choose the most likely representation (e.g., the /k/ sound is commonly spelt with a 'c' as in cat, or a 'k' as in kick). A good way to do this is through Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping, in which a grid is used to map sounds to their corresponding letter/s (see Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping tip sheet for more details on this approach).
- In order to develop children's phonics knowledge, a structured and systematic program focusing on synthetic phonics is highly recommended. Some examples of highly structured, evidence-based programs include *Sounds~Write*, *Letters and Sounds*, and *Jolly Phonics* (see *Examples of Phonics Programs* tip sheet for more details regarding specific programs).
- Any program will be most effective when it is undertaken on a regular basis (4-5 days per week) for a limited time (15 -30 minutes).
- A trained specialist teacher or tutor is the best person to deliver remediation. DSF has a register of trained and recommended tutors. On-line tutoring over the internet is also available for children who are outside the metropolitan area. See www.dsf.net.au/tutoring for more information.

- Useful resources to support phonics development

- > The **DSF Tune into the Sounds of English Pack** features colourful information cards detailing the sounds of English and the way we write them down (spelling patterns), in addition to a Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping pad for practicing spelling and a comprehensive and user-friendly Guide to Spelling Rules.
- > The **DSF Phonics Activity Pack** is an ideal resource for phonics-based intervention at any level. It includes a small magnetic whiteboard with a full set of 78 magnetic alphabet letters, digraphs, trigraphs, and vowel teams. Use the letter tiles to assist with a phonemic approach to spelling and to encourage the blending of sounds and segmenting of words. It also encourages reluctant writers to have a go at spelling.
- > **Computer-based programs** are useful and motivating resources for children to reinforce and consolidate their learning. Both *Wordshark* and the *Nessy Learning Program* are effective highly-structured, games-based computer programs aimed at improving reading and spelling skills.

3. Spelling Conventions and Patterns

- Children need to develop their knowledge of orthographic rules including acceptable letter combinations, letter sequences and the use of certain letters. Spelling conventions provide us with guidelines about the use of letter combinations and sequences and when to use them. For example, the letter 'c' usually represents the /k/ sound when followed by an 'a', 'o' and 'u' as in *cat, cot, cut*, and it usually represents the /s/ sound when followed by 'e', 'i', and 'y' as in *centre, city, cycle*.
- Encourage children to become "word detectives" and look for consistencies in English spelling rules.
- > Some useful resources for spelling rules are: *Signposts for Correct Spelling*, (J. Bullus & P.Coles) *The Spelling Rulebook* (SEN Marketing), and *Spelling for Life* (L.Stone).

4. Metacognitive and Memory Skills

- Children may benefit from using memory 'tricks' and strategies to remember irregular words and complex patterns. These include:
 - > Over-articulation of words to inform spelling choices (e.g., *Wed-nes-day, iSland*)
 - > Knowledge of word families, including letter patterns in common (e.g., 'wh' question words: when/who/what/which; words with links in meaning: two/twin/twice; common orthographic patterns: light/night/sight)
 - > Occasional use of mnemonics (e.g., "Bears Eat Apples Under Trees" for beautiful)
 - > Does it look right? (e.g., *friend/frend, teech/teach*)
- *Oz Mnemonics* by Alison Rowe is a useful book containing rhymes and ways to remember the spelling of difficult or irregular words.

5. Morphology and Syntax (Grammar)

- Explicit instruction in morphology and syntax teaches children to identify and analyse units of meaning within words (i.e., roots, prefixes and suffixes), and consider their spelling within the context of a sentence. Knowledge of a word's grammatical function informs spelling choices when typical sounding-out strategies are unsuccessful (meaning trumps pronunciation e.g., musician, not musishan). This includes:
 - > Expanding knowledge of grammatical function within a sentence (e.g., although we say a /t/ at the end of regular past tense verbs as in 'kicked', we always write 'ed' to show the tense).
 - > Expanding knowledge about typical changes at the end of words to indicate grammatical changes (e.g., we always use 's' to signal plural, although it can sound like /z/ as in 'dogs').
 - > Developing knowledge of suffixes to recognise parts of speech (e.g. -ly = adverbs, -ive = adjectives, -ment & -ion = nouns).
- A useful resource to assist in the development of children's knowledge of morphemes are the **DSF Magnetic Morpheme Cards**. Each magnetic card contains a morpheme – an element of speech which carries meaning. For younger students, these cards can be used in word building activities focusing on basic word endings e.g., -ed, -s.

6. Semantic Knowledge and Etymology

- For older children, developing their knowledge of word origins and meaning is a key component to developing their spelling skills and inform their spelling choices. For example:
 - > Consideration of word meaning will aid in the spelling of homophones (e.g., where/wear).
 - > Consideration given to the origin of the word will assist in determining the most likely spelling (e.g., /s/ = 'ps' in Greek-derived words like 'psychologist').
 - > Understanding that many long words have a base component which carries meaning, influences the spelling, and remains constant despite the sounds we hear (e.g., *definite, finish, infinity*).