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How and why does phonics and comprehension skill instruction impact on spelling, reading
and self-efficacy for struggling adolescent learners?

A case-study

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Abstract

The ability to read and write is important to learning; there is a reciprocal relationship between reading and cognitive development, and academic achievement. Adolescents who experience difficulties in spelling and reading have been found to display avoidance behaviour, and low self-efficacy, or over inflated self-efficacy that is incongruent to capability. This case study investigated how and why spelling, reading, comprehension and self-efficacy for four struggling adolescent spellers and readers was impacted by a phonological based and comprehension skills intervention. The intervention implemented was *Agility with Sound*. The children received eight weeks of intervention aimed at improving their spelling, word decoding and comprehension. Pre and post-intervention measures of spelling, decoding, word decoding, and comprehension were taken. Measures of pre and post-intervention self-efficacy, to investigate the influences of phonic knowledge and comprehension skill development on self-efficacy, were also taken. Infield observations and post-intervention student interviews were used to provide an in-depth investigation. There were meaningful increases in word decoding and spelling. Participants reported phonological-based instruction simplified and reduced the ambiguity of word spellings and decoding. The impact on self-efficacy was that judgements were recalibrated to more accurate judgements of capability; although the adolescent learners reported their improved skill knowledge increased their belief they could improve their spelling and reading comprehension overtime. Struggling adolescent children do benefit from explicit phonics instruction. Time constraints reduced the opportunity for the consolidation of skills which impacted on comprehension development for two students, and self-efficacy growth.

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Table of contents

Chapter one	6
Introduction	6
Literacy as a life skill.....	6
Literacy outcomes in New Zealand	6
Literacy difficulties and self-efficacy.....	8
Reading and spelling skills	8
The rationale	9
The research problem	9
The present study.....	10
Thesis overview.....	10
Chapter Two	12
Literature Review	12
Introduction	12
Self-efficacy and motivation.....	12
Self-efficacy and skill development.....	13
Theories of reading development	15
Word decoding	15
The decoding and spelling relationship.....	18
Comprehension in reading.....	19
Interventions with struggling readers	20
Interventions to support spelling, reading and comprehension.....	20
Reading and spelling instruction in New Zealand	23
Chapter summary	25
Research Questions	25
Chapter Three.....	26
Methodology	26
Chapter introduction	26
Research design	26
Setting.....	27
Participants	28
Ethical considerations and procedures	28
The intervention - Agility with Sound.....	30
Study procedures and timeframe.....	30
Measures to support credibility and trustworthiness of the study	31
Data collection methods	32
Self-efficacy	33
Decoding.....	34

Word decoding.....	35
Spelling.....	35
Reading Comprehension.	36
Agility with Sound.....	36
Student interviews.....	37
Field notes.	37
Data analysis procedures	38
Chapter summary	38
Chapter four.....	39
Research findings	39
Introduction	39
Individual case results	39
Jessie.	39
Foz.....	46
Rodi.	54
Thunder.	62
Cross case analysis.....	69
Spelling findings across the cases.	71
Decoding findings across cases.....	72
Word decoding findings across the cases.	72
Reading comprehension findings across the cases.....	73
Self-efficacy findings across the cases.....	73
Chapter summary	74
Chapter five	75
Discussion	75
Chapter summary.....	79
Chapter six.....	81
Conclusion	81
Summary of findings.....	81
Implications and recommendations	83
Limitations of the research.....	84
Considerations for future research.....	85
Conclusion	85
References	87
Appendix A	98
Massey University Human Ethics Committee approval.....	98
Massey University Human Ethics Committee self-efficacy scale addition approval....	98
Invitation to participate letter for the principal and school board.....	98
Principal information sheet.	98

Care-givers information sheet.....	98
Participant information sheet.....	98
Appendix B.....	107
The <i>Agility with Sound</i> intervention overview.....	107
List of typical lesson tasks.....	107
Appendix C.....	111
Self-efficacy scale.....	111
Semi-structured student interviews.....	111
Appendix D.....	114
Jessie's errors on assessments.....	114
Foz's errors on assessments.....	114
Rodi's errors on assessments.....	114
Thunder's errors on assessments.....	114
Self-efficacy graphs.....	114
Appendix E.....	123
Self-efficacy graphs.....	123

List of Tables

Table 4.1 Jessie’s self-efficacy pre and post-intervention.....	41
Table 4.2 Jessie’s pre and post-intervention assessment scores	42
Table 4.3 Foz’s self-efficacy pre and post-intervention.....	48
Table 4.4 Foz’s Pre and post-intervention assessment scores.....	49
Table 4.5 Rodi’s self-efficacy pre and post-intervention	56
Table 4.6 Rodi’s pre and post intervention assessment scores	57
Table 4.7 Thunder’s self-efficacy pre and post-intervention.....	64
Table 4.8 Thunder’s pre and post-intervention assessment scores	65