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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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