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The Effects of Teaching Analogy-based Reading and Spelling Strategies to Children in Years Three and Four

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Abstract

The dominant approach to teaching reading and spelling in New Zealand schools is grounded in whole-language theory. This approach to literacy instruction disadvantages children with weak alphabet knowledge and phonological skills. Deficits in these crucial skills are the most commonly implicated causes of persistent reading difficulties. Left unremediated, problems with initial mastery of the essential skills underpinning reading and spelling are likely to result in long term difficulties. In fact, research indicates that interventions for children who are still struggling to attain fundamental reading skills in year five are more time-consuming, more expensive, and less likely to be successful than those implemented at an earlier stage.

The current study was a non-randomised, pretest-intervention-posttest design with one control group. The aim of the study was to implement and evaluate the effects of an analogy strategy-based intervention programme, based on the Benchmark Word Detectives Programme, which taught phonological skills and analogy strategies for reading and spelling. The intervention involved a group of year three and four children ($n = 15$) with reading and spelling difficulties. Children were assessed in a range of literacy related measures before and after the intervention programme. Lessons were 30-45 minutes in duration, four times a week, for eight weeks (a total of 32 lessons). The efficacy of the programme in accelerating children's progress in reading and spelling related skills, relative to a non-intervention control group, was evaluated.

The key findings from the present study were that an eight-week small-group intervention focusing on analogy strategies significantly improved children's letter-sound knowledge, phonemic awareness, decoding, and spelling skills compared to that of a control group. These findings suggest that a modified version of the Benchmark Word Detectives Programme can be effective in improving the skills of New Zealand children who struggle with reading and spelling.

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