The effects of explicit spelling lesson programs on performance outcomes of upper primary students


Abstract

The study is concerned with improving the spelling performance of below average spellers in an upper primary mainstream classroom setting. The main target group is children who do not qualify for learning support resources yet have difficulty thriving in the literacy area of spelling. It was expected that lessons designed to expand students’ knowledge about words and the English language system would generate a greater student facility with learning spellings. A quasi-experimental methodological approach was taken which also has features of a controlled trials study. Four spelling intervention lesson programs were designed and each has a different pedagogic emphasis: 1) Metacognitive and multisensory learning strategies 2) Teacher-Best-Practice 3) Teacher-designed inquiry-based group work 4) Learning with a computer-based Team Learning System. The study design is both practical and pragmatic in that only resources already available to the schools were utilised; lesson formats and teaching practices can be easily replicated; and the spelling programs are compatible with NSW curriculum directives. The intervention lesson program took place for one hour per week over a two-term period and involved four schools situated in the outer areas of Sydney, Australia. Students and teachers in nine upper primary classrooms took part in the study, five of which were intervention classes and four were non-intervention classes. The classroom teachers were an important factor in the program presentation and lessons with an explicit focus on words were conducted from a constructivist perspective. Results indicate that when spelling becomes an instructional focus, substantial progress in performance levels can be made in both intervention and non-intervention classrooms. Discussion of the findings examines how pedagogic factors influenced learning outcomes for all ability groups in the literacy area of spelling. Particular attention is given to the progress in spelling age made by below average performers, as determined on pre-testing, and students with lower than normal cognitive ability. It is considered that the more interactive approach to teaching spelling, plus a high level of congruence with the Quality Teaching model (NSW DET, 2003) elements of Engagement, High-order Thinking, and Substantive Communication, assisted these target groups of students in the intervention classes. The principal conclusion that can be drawn from the findings of the study is that minimal modifications to teaching practices can bring about...
improvement in students’ spelling performance levels. It illustrates the capacity of children to advance their learning outcomes when lessons are designed and delivered in a manner that encourages engagement and interactive support. Such a conclusion directs the responsibility for students’ learning outcomes to their classroom teachers. The study identifies that there are implications for the providers of in-service and pre-service professional development of teachers situated in upper primary mainstream classrooms, and the pedagogic aspirations of the primary school community.

The Effects of Background Music on Primary School Pupils’ Task Performance. Susan Hallam, John Price & Georgia Katsarou. Institute of Education, University of London, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AA, UK. We might expect that the effects of music on the behaviour and task performance of children, unlike those of adults, would follow predictable trends, as they would have had relatively little opportunity to acquire specific associations between particular events and specific pieces or types of music. We would expect their responses to be based on relatively primitive mechanisms. Spelling mistakes do not matter. You will have 10 seconds to write the missing word in each sentence. Every ten seconds I will tell you to turn the page.