Spelling Mastery

Spelling is an essential skill that needs to be taught explicitly (Westwood, 2018). In reality, many children are poor spellers because teachers do not feel confident teaching spelling, and may never have learnt the principles of spelling themselves.

The English written language is a complex blend of many languages and incorporates 26 letters and approximately 45 phonemes which can be spelled in over 350 alternative ways. While many claim that spelling is far too irregular to teach, the English written language does conform to predictable patterns and more importantly those patterns can be taught directly to students.

Spelling Mastery (Dixon, Engelmann & Bauer, 2007) is a developmental Direct Instruction program that explicitly teaches three highly effective spelling strategies: phonemic, whole word and morphemic depending on the spelling ability of the students (Hempenstall, 2015). The phonemic strategy teaches students how to segment regular words into sounds (ie. m-u-s-t) and apply letter-sound knowledge. The whole word strategy is used for words that

are neither phonetically regular nor contain morphographs (ie. thought, through). Rather than memorise whole words, Spelling Mastery provides systematic practice spelling these words in a highly scaffolded way. Finally, the morphemic strategy teaches students about the smallest part of words that have meaning (ie. un is a prefix that means not, pack is a base word that means to fill and ing is a suffix that means happening now).

Over five decades of evidence supports the effectiveness of Direct Instruction curricular regardless of student population (i.e., general education, special education, English language learners, rural, economically disadvantaged, primary and secondary) (Barbash, 2012; Liem & Martin, 2014; Stockard, Wood, Coughlin & Khoury, 2018). Spelling Mastery takes approximately 20 minutes daily to deliver.

This workshop will provide an overview on the theory underpinning Direct Instruction, the scope and sequence of Spelling Mastery and the practicalities of delivering and setting up this approach in a school.

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Teach Well.

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