The Use of Mental Imagery in Improving the Simultaneous and Successive Processing Abilities of Grade V Learners with Learning Disorders of Reading and Written Expression

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology

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I hereby declare that this research project is, except where specified, my own work and has not been submitted for degree purposes to any other university.

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Karen C. Els
Abstract:

This study forms part of a series of studies on the use of mental imagery in learning. Preliminary data suggests that high mental imagery techniques are as effective as phonological based techniques in the remediation of the English language abilities of learners with difficulties in reading and written expression, and may lead to greater improvements where children have previously not learned using phonic approaches to learning to read, write and spell. Preliminary data further suggest that cognitive improvements, which cannot be explained purely by maturation factors, are also apparent as a result. The primary focus of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of high mental imagery techniques in improving the simultaneous and successive processing abilities of Grade V learners with learning disorders of reading and written expression. It also aimed to explore the usefulness of mental imagery techniques in improving the English spelling, reading and writing abilities of these learners.

Eight Grade V learners attending a remedial primary school were selected to participate in this study. These learners were those who, in view of their scholastic history, were considered to be ‘treatment resisters’, implying that they had progressed poorly and had not responded well to other forms of traditional remedial intervention received in improving their English language abilities. Each participant’s cognitive, spelling, reading and writing abilities were pre and post tested utilising various psycho-educational and cognitive psychological assessment tools and their phonic skills were analysed. The sample received six months of bi-weekly individual remedial tuition in accordance with the remedial intervention strategy of the study group to which the participants had been randomly assigned. Four participants were tutored via high mental imagery techniques (experimental group) and four participants tutored utilising a phonological approach, forming the contrast group.

Aggregated case study methodology was utilised to analyse the data. The results of this pilot study suggest that high mental imagery techniques are useful in improving the successive and simultaneous processing abilities and reading, spelling and writing skills of learners suffering learning disorders of reading and written expression. It should be noted that statistical analysis of the results was not undertaken owing to the small numbers of participants comprising the sample. However, when results obtained were analysed on a case by case basis as well as through aggregated case contrasts, there were strong indications to suggest that the gains made by the those participants tutored using high mental imagery techniques exceeded those of participants tutored in phonological techniques.

(i)
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Book 1 - Table of Contents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of contents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of tables</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter One - Introduction

1.1 Introduction                                                                 | 1 |
1.2 Learning disorders                                                          | 3 |
1.3 Introduction to high mental imagery remedial techniques                    | 6 |
1.4 High mental imagery techniques and simultaneous and successive mental processing | 7 |
1.5 Research aims                                                              | 7 |
1.6 Research rationale                                                         | 8 |
1.7 Research questions                                                          | 10 |
1.8 Summary of chapter                                                         | 10 |
1.9 Outline of this research dissertation                                       | 11 |
1.10 Glossary of terms                                                         | 12 |

Chapter Two – High mental imagery techniques

2.1 Introduction to high mental imagery techniques                              | 16 |
2.2 The phonic inventories                                                     | 18 |
2.3 The graded application of high imagery techniques: Levels of targeted revisualisation | 21 |
2.4 Summary of chapter                                                         | 26 |

Chapter Three – Literature review

3.1 Introduction                                                               | 27 |
3.2 The neuropsychological basis of learning                                   | 28 |
3.3 The nature of intelligence and the PASS model                             | 33 |
3.4 Successive and simultaneous processing abilities and intelligence          | 35 |
3.5 Successive and simultaneous processing abilities                           | 37 |
3.6 The formation of words in English                                          | 39 |
3.7 Successive and simultaneous processing abilities and reading and writing skills | 53 |
3.8 Learning disorders of reading and written express included in this study and successive and simultaneous mental processing | 55 |
3.9 The remediation of successive and simultaneous processing abilities         | 60 |
3.10 The remediation of reading, writing and spelling……………………………………………62
3.11 Visual imagery……………………………………………………………………………….65
3.12 The usefulness of high mental imagery techniques in the remediation of reading, writing and spelling…………………………………………………………………………….69
3.13 The usefulness of high mental imagery techniques in the remediation of successive and simultaneous processing abilities……………………………………………… ………………….71
3.14 Computer guided practice and colour coding in multi-sensory teaching methodology……..73
3.15 The theoretical basis of high imagery remedial techniques………………………… ……… .75
3.16 Summary of chapter…………………………………………… ……………………..…… ...76

Chapter Four – Methodology
4.1 Sample………………………………………………………………………………………78
4.2 Procedure……………………………………………………………………………………79
4.3 Measurement instruments……………………………………………………………… ……..80
4.4 Data analysis……………………………………………………………………………………96
4.5 Ethical considerations………………………………………………………………………97
4.6 Summary of chapter………………………………………………………………………….98

Chapter Five – Results
5.1 Participant EA………………………………………………………………………….…….. .99
5.2 Participant EB…………………………………………………………………………………106
5.3 Participant EC…………………………………………………………………………………114
5.4 Participant ED…………………………………………………………………………………121
5.5 Participant CA…………………………………………………………………………………129
5.6 Participant CB…………………………………………………………………………………136
5.7 Participant CC…………………………………………………………………………………143
5.8 Participant CD…………………………………………………………………………………150
5.9 Summary of chapter…………………………………………………………………………157

Chapter Six - Discussion
6.1 Case study aggregation of matched pairs EA and CA…………………………………….… 158
6.2 Case study aggregation of matched pairs EB and CB……………………………………….161
6.3 Case study aggregation of matched pairs EC and CC………………………………………..164
6.4 Case study aggregation of matched pairs ED and CD………………………………………..167
6.5 Aggregation of experimental and contrast group clusters……………………………………170

(iv)
Appendix (Book 2) - List of Tables

Table 20.1: EA (pretesting) - Analysis of phonic errors made on the phonic inventories…Book 2
Table 20.2: EA (posttesting) - Analysis of phonic errors made on the phonic inventories…Book 2
Table 20.3: Pre and post test results (reading and spelling) for Participant EA………………..Book 2
Table 20.4: Pre and post testing CAS and K-ABC results for Participant EA………………..Book 2
Table 21.1: EB (pretesting) - Analysis of phonic errors made on the phonic inventories…Book 2
Table 21.2: EB (posttesting) - Analysis of phonic errors made on the phonic inventories…Book 2
Table 21.3: Pre and post test results (reading and spelling) for Participant EB………………..Book 2
Table 21.4: Pre and post testing CAS and K-ABC results for Participant EB………………..Book 2
Table 22.1: EC (pretesting) - Analysis of phonic errors made on the phonic inventories…Book 2
Table 22.2: EC (posttesting) - Analysis of phonic errors made on the phonic inventories…Book 2
Table 22.3: Pre and post test results (reading and spelling) for Participant EC………………..Book 2
Table 22.4: Pre and post testing CAS and K-ABC results for Participant EC………………..Book 2
Table 23.1: ED (pretesting) - Analysis of phonic errors made on the phonic inventories…Book 2
Table 23.2: ED (posttesting) - Analysis of phonic errors made on the phonic inventories…Book 2
Table 23.3: Pre and post test results (reading and spelling) for Participant ED………………..Book 2
Table 23.4: Pre and post testing CAS and K-ABC results for Participant ED………………..Book 2
Table 24.1: CA (pretesting) - Analysis of phonic errors made on the phonic inventories…Book 2
Table 24.2: CA (posttesting) - Analysis of phonic errors made on the phonic inventories…Book 2
Table 24.3: Pre and post test results (reading and spelling) for Participant CA………………..Book 2
Table 24.4: Pre and post testing CAS and K-ABC results for Participant CA………………..Book 2
Table 25.1: CB (pretesting) - Analysis of phonic errors made on the phonic inventories…Book 2
Table 25.2: CB (posttesting) - Analysis of phonic errors made on the phonic inventories…Book 2
Table 25.3: Pre and post test results (reading and spelling) for Participant CB………………..Book 2
Table 25.4: Pre and post testing CAS and K-ABC results for Participant CB………………..Book 2
Table 26.1: CC (pretesting) - Analysis of phonic errors made on the phonic inventories…Book 2
Table 26.2: CC (posttesting) - Analysis of phonic errors made on the phonic inventories…Book 2
Table 26.3: Pre and post test results (reading and spelling) for Participant CC………………..Book 2
Table 26.4: Pre and post testing CAS and K-ABC results for Participant CC………………..Book 2
Table 27.1: CD (pretesting) - Analysis of phonic errors made on the phonic inventories…Book 2
Table 27.2: CD (posttesting) - Analysis of phonic errors made on the phonic inventories…Book 2
Table 27.3: Pre and post test results (reading and spelling) for Participant CD………………..Book 2
Table 27.4: Pre and post testing CAS and K-ABC results for Participant CD………………..Book 2
Table 28: Participant EA: Session Summary………………………………………………..Book 2
Table 29: Participant EB: Session Summary………………………………………………..Book 2
Table 30: Participant EC: Session Summary………………………………………………..Book 2
Table 31: Participant ED: Session Summary………………………………………………..Book 2
Table 32: Participant CA: Session Summary………………………………………………..Book 2
Table 33: Participant CB: Session Summary………………………………………………..Book 2
Table 34: Participant CC: Session Summary………………………………………………..Book 2
Table 35: Participant CD: Session Summary………………………………………………..Book 2