**The Learning How to Spell Prompts**

The **Background**

As Howard Gardner promotes, the skill of synthesising is one of the skills for the 21st Century. The journey involved in compiling, collating, developing, creating and producing these prompts is similar to tracing the source of a river: where and who is involved and should be credited is a complex matter and perhaps Confucius sums it up best by thinking, “Man who thinks he has an original idea merely has a bad memory”

The spelling prompts range from being at least twenty years old to those on the IPad apps produced this year.

One prompt: Using Different Sizes of Letters came from an American manual donated to me by a parent of a very dyslexic pupil in the early 1990’s. Interestingly, some teachers think it is potentially very confusing if it uses lower and upper case letters alternately. Therefore that challenge can be changed to simply using large and small lower case letters if that makes more “sense” and another learning prompt has evolved! Other prompts can also be adapted.

Lee Pascal demonstrated another prompt, Visualising at a National Dyslexia Conference at Heriot Watt University about ten years ago. I have no idea whether he may have borrowed this idea from his grandmother or perhaps even a Dr Gunther Faber.

The spelling prompt, Odd One Out was demonstrated at a Tapestry Conference and also used in Active Assessment in Science in 2005. A colleague and I transferred it into the writing process which was used in an AifL project in 2006 across South Lanarkshire Council. Nowadays everyone uses it as it links with everything curricular. It has been suggested that if used from the age of three to eighteen on a regular basis, all pupils would develop greater skills in thinking – see Bloom’s Updated Taxonomy if you want to check which levels of thinking you are hitting. Very little planning is required by the teacher and it can be tackled either collaboratively or competitively: not ideal for an individual as dialogue is vital.

**The modes of learning**

Some prompts are more visual, some have an emphasis on auditory skills, others use kinaesthetic elements of learning: most use a combination. It is not intended that pupils are given just the particular mode of learning that might reflect their learning style. For once, I agree with the men and women in grey suits (Fifty Shades of Spelling?) that VAK is not appropriate in differentiating; we require and use all forms of learning (multi sensory) most of the time for most of the pupils.

Pupils should develop the skills of knowing which learning technique works best in each context. For instance, Speed Writing is better not used until a word is known confidently; however, it could be used as a pre and post assessment of learning.

There are no significantly correct or wrong solutions in choosing the learning methodologies as long as a pupil learns and understands how he / she learns during this spelling process – supported and guided by an adult / peer is obviously beneficial.

**Implementation**

Schools and teachers use these prompts in different ways usually beyond Primary Two as younger learners use more tactile, art related modes of activities (with foam, paint etc). Here is a selection of possible choices. The teacher has to make these work in the context of her learning and not just hand them out:

* Teach one strategy a week, involve parents.
* Teach two strategies per week, involve parents
* Share these learning processes with parents at workshops, or through leaflets BEFORE pupils take home.
* Allocate each class a number of techniques that suit so that there are not too many being shown and that there is a freshness in every class
* Teach spelling and then allow pupils to practise their learning with these techniques.
* Pupils need to be monitored to do these techniques well rather than just quickly go through them. For instance, SUS needs to be modelled to encourage quality thinking and analysis. Pupils should use different skills in studying the word: thinking of sounds, patterns and numbers of letters ... anything that requires close studying.
* Some teachers let pupils choose the technique they want for the week or appropriate prompts for the words they are learning
* Paired / group work using the techniques with other learners with either the same or different words

(I used to teach P.3 pupils how if they used a number of techniques well, they could all end up spelling the word *psychologist* correctly – and 99% of them could.)

These prompts are just an element of learning how to spell and can be combined with diacritical marking, co-operative learning and many other practices. Enjoy using, enjoy life, enjoy learning.

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