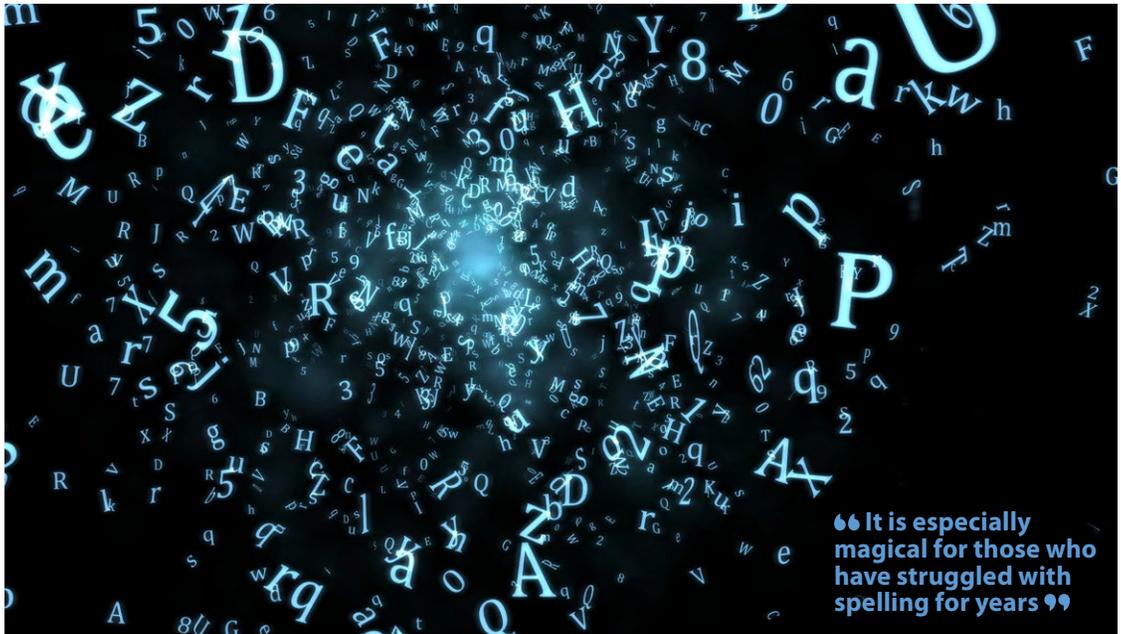


The Magic in **Magical Spelling** Helping children spell better

By Caitlin Ann Walker and Jacqueline Ann Surin



“It is especially magical for those who have struggled with spelling for years”

Magical Spelling is a process that is helping children and adults learn how to spell in a way that suits their learning, is easy to master, and is fast and sustainable. It is especially magical for those who have struggled with spelling for years.

One Magical Spelling tutor reported that after teaching the process to a special educational needs group and getting the children's spelling ages re-tested after two months, 'one dyslexic child had gone up six months, four had gone up 12 months and one had gone up 18 months'. This was much further than she'd expect using conventional spelling methods.

What is Magical Spelling and how could it change the way we teach children to spell?

What happens in Magical Spelling?

The first thing a Magical Spelling tutor does is to help a child find their magical space. Each person has a unique space where they store and recall their words. This is usually up above their eye line and around three feet away but it can vary wildly between learners. Part of the magic of this process is helping the children to identify their own space.

A Magical Spelling tutor says, 'If I were going to show

you a word on this card to learn, where would you like me to hold it?' She then holds a piece of blank card in front of the child and slowly moves it until the child finds the space that feels best for them.

The process is easy and puts the children in control from the start. They are able to do it for one another and later on these 'sweet spots' within their visual field can be used for remembering math, science formulas, even phone numbers.

Once the child has identified their magical space, the tutor moves out of it and invites the children to think of a really good feeling that's just right for them. Examples have included: relaxing in the library; knowing your goal will go in; or being in bed with family cosily watching a movie.

The tutor then helps the child to develop the good feeling by asking some Clean (*1) questions such as:

- When relaxing, *what kind of relaxing?*
- And *whereabouts is that knowing?*
- And it's cosy, *is there anything else about that cosy?*
- And *does that feeling have a size or a shape?*

Once the children have got a strong sense of their

good feeling, they can practise switching it off and on. This is a great skill for all learners and can be used before tests, or anytime a child wants to feel resourceful. Next, the tutor helps the child to switch on the great feeling, while looking at their magical space. By doing that, both the magical space and the good feeling are anchored together. This helps the child to create a good *learning state* for visual information.

Then, the tutor shows the child a word on a card – usually a four or five-letter word at the start, in lower case letters – and gets the child to access their good feeling and to place the word in their magical space. The child is invited to notice that they can see the whole word and the letters in the word either from left to right, or from right to left.

The tutor covers the word with a blank piece of card while keeping the card in the child's magical space. This is to let the child notice that he can still see the letters of the word in the space even if it's been covered.

The child is then asked to read out the letters they are visualising and copy the word down. The tutor doesn't move on to another stage until a child has mastered the stage before. So, a child must be able to see the letters in a word forwards and backwards before the tutor will move on to another word.

Most children get it within the first session but to make it really effective, three sessions are recommended. A tutor usually teaches three to six words per session, and asks the child to practise Magical Spelling each day with around three words.

For every letter that the child gets right, he gives himself a tick and is encouraged to congratulate himself with a 'Yes!' If a child leaves out a letter, the tutor will ask him: 'And what could you do now that makes sure that letter stays in that magical space?' Or if a letter is there that shouldn't be there, the tutor might say: 'What needs to happen so that you just have these letters here?'

By doing that, Magical Spelling tutors are training the children to only adjust what needs to be adjusted, instead of marking them wrong.

Moving away from phonics

Phonics are commonly taught in English as an approach to reading and spelling. The problem with phonetic spelling in *English* is that the language is not phonetically consistent. For example, 'ough' in English can be pronounced in eight different ways as demonstrated by: 'A rough-coated, dough-faced ploughman strode through the streets of Scarborough, coughing and hiccoughing thoughtfully.' This is a result of how much the English language has influences and contributions

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from the Celts, Romans, German tribes, Latin words, Vikings, French and other cultures.

Many children who misspell words feel stupid or incapable, when actually they are demonstrating the ability to work out how words sound and then to spell them phonetically. One of our pupils was ashamed of her written work in which she'd put: difrent, printsess and sumwun. We were able to show her that these were perfect phonetic representations of these words and that she couldn't have seen them before, therefore she was creating them following phonic rules.

With Magical Spelling, we use visual, spatial memory that is three-dimensional and anchored by good feelings. This avoids phonic misspelling and we find dyslexic learners, as well as their non-dyslexic colleagues, thrive on this process.

Indeed, the finding from a Georgetown University Medical Centre study (*2) shows that 'when we look at a known word, our brain sees it like a picture, not a group of letters needing to be processed'.

The study's senior author, Dr Maximilian Riesenhuber, says the brain uses a 'visual dictionary' to recognise words. 'For people who cannot learn words by phonetically spelling them out – which is the current UK method for teaching reading – learning the whole word as a visual object may be a good strategy,' he says.

One other factor that makes Magical Spelling a powerful and sustainable way to learn is that the children pick out their unique magical space. They choose the good feeling that is right for them. They decide what needs to happen to help them better visualise and recall how a word looks. By understanding themselves, they can learn spelling more easily and they can also apply these skills to learning other subjects.

All of this and the fact that troubled learners can now spell and read fluently boosts a child's confidence and opens up new opportunities for them. ■

References

(*1) Clean Language was developed by the late David Grove. He was a psychotherapist from New Zealand who pioneered and developed both Clean Language and Emergent Knowledge. Clean Language is a series of questions that are neutral and client-directed. They keep the client focused on his or her experience, and strip out the questioner's assumptions, judgments, experiences or views.

(*2) Georgetown University Medical Center, 'After learning new words, brain sees them as pictures.'

Magical Spelling is a quick and easy way for anyone to learn to spell. If you're interested in learning more about Magical Spelling and how you could apply it to yourself or your organisation, please visit our website (www.magicalspelling.co.uk) or find us on Facebook. You can buy the Magical Spelling e-book, or the Magical Spelling Workbook and CD from our online store.