

# The Power of Zapper Learning

...or how one school's spelling test results made me whoop...

Two year groups took part in the full Spelling Zapper programme:

On average the Y3 pupils *doubled* their rate of expected progress, advancing a year over the five month trial. There were some very impressive individual results.

On average the Y6 pupils *quadrupled* their rate of progress, advancing two years over the five months trial. Again some individual results were very impressive.

(Read the Carfield Story)

## *The Carfield Story*

When the headteacher of Carfield Primary School , Lorna Culloden, was looking for a new spelling approach at the start of this school year I managed to persuade her to trial Spelling Zappers - a spelling approach I had created and one of the growing Zapper Learning family. A Zapper is a very visual learning approach. It's based on a folded card inside of which is a grid of squares with challenges inside each square (e.g. a spelling word or times table.) A letter Z is put in a corner of a square when a correct answer is given and this is repeated for the other squares. Although a seemingly simple approach, I knew, from my own experience, that Spelling Zappers could really boost children's spelling ages and confidence... but I wanted some up to date evidence.\*\*\*

It was decided that, initially, the Y6 teachers would introduce Spelling Zappers to their own classes. I met Jamie Thompson and his fellow Y6 colleagues and described how Spelling Zappers work, stressing the importance of spelling strategies, multi-sensory learning and careful peer partnerships - children assessing each other in pairs. The Y6 teachers quickly grasped how Spelling Zappers worked and began the programme.



It was clear when I visited Jamie's class a short while after this meeting (I was introduced as Zapper Woman!) that all the key aspects that make Spelling Zappers work were in place. The children loved their personalised Zapper cards and the zapping itself. In particular they loved seeing their partners draw a Z in each corner of a word grid every time a word was spelt correctly. These Zs increased daily until they had a big Z across the whole word and eventually the whole grid. Importantly their teachers noticed that more of these words were being correctly spelt in their independent work. Children were actively using the strategies to learn to spell the irregular or tricky words (from the statutory Y5/6 list) combined with two or three personal spelling words. Once a grid had been completed and the child was ready for the next set of words a new grid can be 'stuck' over the previous set to save making a brand new zapper every time.

Very soon Spelling Zappers just start running themselves and the teacher is free to observe, advise and support.

Differentiation is an inbuilt feature of Spelling Zappers. Children with a dyslexic profile benefit from the emphasis on the multi-sensory and over-learning aspects of Zappers as well as the spelling strategies which are really embedded within the whole process.

The peer assessment aspect of Spelling Zappers created a really powerful learning process and also allowed the teachers to observe how the children were interacting and supporting each other. The child, as tester, knew they had to stick to the rules and assess their partner fairly but they also had to encourage, praise and perhaps discuss spelling strategies that could help with any particularly tricky words.

Interestingly children in one class were noticing how other children were learning in a different way to themselves so there were elements

of metacognition as they considered comparisons to their own learning.

## **The Super Spelling Market is born!**

The school decided they wanted to roll out Spelling Zappers to other years. At this point an inspirational idea, a lightbulb moment took place and it was decided that the Year 6 children would teach the Year 3 children all about Spelling Zappers. We all know that buddying can be extremely effective, especially for the child doing the teaching, so despite concerns about the organisational hurdles of so many children let loose and the Y6 pupils becoming teachers we decided to have a go... it could just work even though it could be an organisational nightmare... but it wasn't. We called it the Super Spelling Market.

I probably should be more restrained and considered in my observations but no I have to say it...the Spelling Supermarket was brilliant - a real triumph! Buddying, or teaching others, is such a powerful tool and to see it in action with nearly 70 year 6 pupils creating ways to ensure the engagement and understanding of their younger 'pupils' of Spelling Zappers was impressive.

In pairs the Y6 pupils manned a stall and each stall took a different aspect of Spelling Zappers. So, for example, one stall was the Spelling Strategy Syllable Stall with games and activities which encouraged the



younger children to use syllables to help them with their spelling of longer words.

**Another stall was the Multi-Sensory Stall which had all different**



**materials for the Y3s to create words in...some were hilarious like cooked spaghetti - but they still got the message across**

**There were almost 160 children involved: all three Y3 classes and all three Y6 classes. It took place in one afternoon and the atmosphere was busy and purposeful. The sound of a buzzer meant the Year 3 children had to move on to the next stall. All of the children were totally involved throughout and their behaviour was exemplary. I went along with a colleague who was photographing the scenes. We both felt that it was one of the best examples of buddying we had ever seen.**

## **Results?**

**So 5 months on and how did the trial go?**

**On average the Y3 pupils *doubled* their rate of expected progress, advancing a year over the five month trial. There were some very impressive individual results.**

**On average the Y6 pupils *quadrupled* their rate of progress advancing two years over the five months trial. Again some individual results were very impressive.**

**As it was a trial and there were time constraints, not all year groups and teachers (Year 4 and Year 5) had the opportunity for the full Zapper training or the Super Spelling Market. In a way this unintentionally created a sort of control group where some key areas of Spelling**

**Zappers had not been emphasised with the resulting effect on their spelling progress.**

**Most Y4 and Y5 pupils made some progress but this was not universal. On average these year groups had progressed 6 or 7 months in five months.**

## **Conclusions**

**I firmly believe that a combination of factors produced these results: a huge emphasis on spelling strategies and multi-sensory learning, attractive Zapper cards (with certificates and stickers\*) and a regular daily zapping session. Combine these factors with enthusiastic, trained teachers and you have a potent tool/device that simply works. Finally, the buddying experience for the Y3 and Y6 was a powerful influence - particularly for the year 6 pupils.**

**Finally: I've always been great believer in using Spelling Zappers in short bursts. Great for those 3 or 4 weeks you are concentrating on irregular words and personal words but then taken away...just as they want more! By making Zappers intermittent they become more special.**

**Jamie is keen to continue the programme and is going to use a 4:4 approach. That is he is intending for classes to use Spelling Zappers for the first 4 weeks of each term (irregular words) and then the usual spelling list programme for the second half of the term (words with common patterns). However although the Spelling Zapper is not in active use during the second part of the term its key message of strategies and multi-sensory learning remain. And although the emphasis on the irregular words is not actively being assessed they have been copied onto an alphabet/dictionary sheet so that a complete record of all words is available to the pupil, teacher and home.**



**Of course it's great that spelling ages have been boosted but it's better still that a class is actually enjoying spelling.**

**As one child said: 'They're just fun and you can see yourself getting better and better!'**

***\*For full and comprehensive information about how to set up and run the Spelling Zapper and Times Table Zapper program, including spelling strategies, certificates, stickers visit [spellingzappers.com](http://spellingzappers.com) Also news about the growing Zapper Learning family will appear on this site.***

**Anne Yeadon has been involved in the world of education as a teacher, Senco and presently as an Advisory Teacher.**