



Where's the science? Time for a sea change in teaching literacy

SPELD NZ is calling for a sea change in the way literacy is taught in New Zealand schools.

The Ministry of Education's Chief Scientific Advisor recently had a golden opportunity to recommend evidence-based programmes that reflect the Science of Reading. SPELD NZ believes these programmes are essential to turn around New Zealand's declining literacy levels. Unfortunately, *The Literacy Landscape in Aotearoa NZ* report failed to address the well-established science.

Teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand, as in many parts of the world, are not well prepared for the teaching of literacy. Most graduate and in-service teachers lack current knowledge and understanding of the process of learning to read and write. Many schools are now looking to private providers for professional development in evidence-based, structured literacy programmes. **Meanwhile parents of children with learning difficulties often have to go outside the school system for specialised, user-pays literacy support.** This is an inequitable situation, as only those with access and the financial means can benefit from this critical help. This creates huge distress for families – something SPELD NZ deals with on a daily basis. It is now 13 years since the Ministry of Education officially recognised dyslexia exists. Sadly, since then little has changed in the classroom for children who struggle to read.

SPELD NZ was concerned to see *The Literacy Landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand* continues to emphasise Reading Recovery. Reading Recovery does not effectively diagnose or address gaps in reading knowledge. It is an historical intervention which is not grounded in science. SPELD NZ professionals work with many students who, despite completing the Reading Recovery intervention, are unable to decode words without guessing. These students have not been taught effective strategies to support rapid, accurate, and effortless word reading.

SPELD NZ was also surprised to learn that the author of the report, Professor Stuart McNaughton, is a trustee of the Marie Clay Literacy Trust which actively promotes Reading Recovery in New Zealand and internationally. SPELD NZ believes the public should be aware of this.

As a not-for-profit charity, SPELD NZ has spent nearly 50 years advocating for a greater emphasis on teaching decoding and encoding skills to all learners, particularly those with dyslexia and other specific learning disabilities (SLD). SLD impacts on all aspects of learning. When there is a lack of understanding by teachers and those in senior management roles, the student's ability to reach his/her true potential is severely limited across the curriculum.

SPELD NZ would like to see:

- Early, reliable, evidence-based identification and intervention for literacy difficulties
- All teachers in training develop in-depth knowledge about the Science of Reading including implementation of structured literacy practices
- All in-service primary teachers provided with compulsory professional development about the Science of Reading including implementation of structured literacy practices
- All schools (Years 1 – 13) employ a literacy specialist trained (theory and practical) in the Science of Reading
- Structured, explicit literacy teaching embedded in all levels of education including teacher training
- All English curriculum teachers have comprehensive knowledge and understanding about the Science of Reading
- All schools and all educators recognise the impact low literacy has on all areas of an individual's life, and that they take responsibility to provide evidence-based and relevant intervention programmes in order to remove any barriers to learning.

It is essential that the teaching of literacy in New Zealand:

- Recognises that English is written according to a sound code. The teaching of decoding and encoding skills needs to focus on the sounds in language and the ability to connect sounds to written text
- Acknowledges that all students need and benefit from a structured and systematic phonological based programme in their early years of education. This needs to continue for those students who find learning basic reading and spelling skills difficult
- Highlights the importance of word level reading and writing as well as comprehension and written expression. All elements need direct and systematic teaching **throughout** all levels of education
- Takes responsibility for literacy education regardless of students' varying backgrounds and differing levels of preparedness for learning.

For further comment, please contact Judith Alexander from SPELD NZ

nationaloffice@speld.org.nz

0800 773 536 Ext 3

SPELD NZ is a not-for-profit organisation that provides diagnostic assessment, specialised one-on-one lessons and support for those living with dyslexia and other specific learning disabilities. SPELD NZ is also one of New Zealand's largest providers of training in specific learning disabilities (SLD) for educators and family/whanau.

For more information see www.speld.org.nz

Find us on [Facebook](#)