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# **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPELD AND SCHOOLS IN NEW ZEALAND**

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## **Abstract**

This research investigated the relationship between SPELD teachers and classroom teachers from the Wellington region. A key issue identified in a 2009/2010 evaluation of the SPELD New Zealand organisation was the lack of effective collaboration between SPELD teachers and individuals in the education sector. The present study sought to identify what supports SPELD and schools to work together, what factors restrict the relationship between SPELD and schools, and how can collaboration between SPELD and schools be enhanced. Using a case study methodology, this research investigated SPELD teachers' views and experiences about their relationships with classroom teachers and the schools in which they operate and classroom teachers' views and experiences about their relationships with SPELD teachers and the SPELD organisation in which they operate. The study found that while there were a number of positive factors contributing to an effective collaborative relationship between SPELD teachers and school teachers, there were a number of issues restricting the relationship. In particular, issues arose concerning tutoring within school hours and alignment with the work and schedules of existing specialist staff. Suggestions are offered about ways in which collaboration between SPELD and schools could be enhanced.

## **Dedication**

To my grandmother, Belinda, for first introducing me to the work of the SPELD organisation and for her continual support and encouragement throughout not only this thesis but the duration of my academic career. I am eternally grateful for your ongoing belief and optimism in this project.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to understand the relationship between SPELD and selected schools in New Zealand. In examining this question, focus was given to the factors supporting the relationship and the barriers restricting it, in addition to considering how collaboration between the New Zealand Specific Learning Disabilities Federation, more commonly known as SPELD and schools could be enhanced. Originally established as a private organisation with teachers working outside school hours, in recent years SPELD teachers have started working within schools. As SPELD teachers move from teaching in their homes and the homes of their students to within school hours, questions have arisen about the most effective means that these two institutions, SPELD and schools, can work together to best meet the needs of students with specific learning difficulties.

### Background and Justification for the Study

In 2009, SPELD commissioned the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) to conduct an evaluation of the SPELD organisation in New Zealand. Lack of effective collaboration between SPELD teachers and individuals in the education sector was a key issue to emerge from the reports (Brooking & Rowlands, 2009; Brooking & Hodgen, 2010):

*Many respondents indicated that more sharing of schools and SPELD expertise, could greatly enhance the possibilities of helping students with SLDs [Specific Learning Disabilities]. Many schools and RTLBs [Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour] appreciate the expertise of SPELD but are frustrated that there is not more effective collaboration between schools and SPELD, and that they are not always 'on the same page' in terms of their understandings, interventions and practices. (Brooking & Hodgen, 2010, p.29).*

Findings from this evaluation of SPELD also identified a number of additional factors as possibly leading to difficulties in a collaborative relationship being developed between schools and SPELD. Over half of the school respondents were not convinced that SPELD was more effective than other literacy interventions (Brooking & Hodgen, 2010). As highlighted by Brooking & Rowlands (2009) “up until the present time there has been no research conducted or commissioned into SPELD interventions” (p.3) which may justify school respondents concerns about the effectiveness of SPELD. Those schools who were interested in using SPELD but were not currently doing so was due to the cost involved with SPELD assessment and tuition, and a lack of knowledge about SPELD to warrant using their services (Brooking & Hodgen, 2010). Consideration also needed to be given to the role of the parents in the three-way relationship between school, SPELD, and parent. For many parents in this study the lengthy process of getting some action from the school resulted in them turning to SPELD (Brooking & Rowlands, 2009).

While schools can allow their students to receive assistance from SPELD a number of issues are raised such as: Do schools see a need for SPELD services in their school? What do schools perceive the SPELD teacher's role to be? And, do SPELD's services conflict with services that are already provided by schools such as Reading Recovery? These questions are by no means an exhaustive list but, by highlighting such issues, discussion can develop and clarification can be sought as to what a collaborative relationship between SPELD and schools could entail. It is important to highlight that developing a collaborative relationship between SPELD and schools may not even be desirable, or realistic, for those working in the schooling sector and/or the SPELD teachers. Often the involvement of SPELD with a school is due to parent initiation (Brooking & Hodgen, 2010) which raises the question if it would be preferable for the relationship to solely exist between parent and SPELD teacher as an arrangement entirely independent of the school.

The present research is an in-depth case study into the way relationships currently function between SPELD and schools. If both these institutions deem it necessary to

have an on-going collaborative relationship it is timely to consider the enablers supporting the relationship, the barriers restricting it, and the supports required for this relationship to function effectively in the future.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This chapter begins by examining the nature of collaboration between two agencies. The agencies that are to be the focus of this thesis are SPELD and schools in New Zealand. The literature review considers the background to the SPELD organisation and, as the focus of the SPELD organisation are specific learning disabilities (SLDs), a definition of SLDs is examined. It reviews the supports available for students with learning disabilities in schools and the role private tutoring services, such as the SPELD organisation have in meeting the needs of these students. The chapter concludes with a summary of the literature and the significance of the findings in relation to the present study.

### **Collaboration Between Schools and External Agencies**

Many facets of our personal and professional lives will require us to form collaborative working relationships with other individuals, groups, and organisations. However, achieving a collaborative relationship is more than simply putting people together and expecting a better result (Majumdar, 2006). A range of factors can either enhance or limit the possibility of a successful collaborative partnership developing (Bull, Brooking, & Campbell, 2008). The education sector is one such institution that frequently requires the collaboration of numerous parties to meet the needs of all students. With individuals coming together from a range of backgrounds to meet these needs there can be a clash of ideals, functions, and processes.

This section examines the concept of collaboration in the education sector. It focuses on the barriers and enablers to effective collaborative relationships. It considers agency and school collaboration, in addition to family-school relationships and community-school relationships. As well as an examination of collaboration, this literature review makes reference to case studies of collaboration between schools and community partners, schools and parents, and schools and speech language therapists.

### Collaboration

Hart (1998) defines collaboration as “the cooperation of equals who voluntarily share decision making and work toward common goals” (p.90). Bruner (1991 cited in Daka-Mulwanda, Thornburg, Filbert, & Klein, 1995) elaborates further by listing three elements that are a part of collaboration: (a) jointly developing and agreeing to a set of common goals and direction; (b) sharing responsibility for obtaining those goals; and (c) working together to achieve those goals, using the expertise of each collaborator.

Interdependence among participating organisations that choose to combine their efforts to achieve better outcomes is an important factor in collaboration (Majumdar, 2006). Collaborative efforts appear to be more effective in achieving goals than are non-collaborative efforts (Daka-Mulwanda et al., 1995). In relation to the education sector, Heath and McLaughlin (1987) argue for the importance of the collaborative relationship between schools and communities. The authors highlight that community involvement is important because effective schooling often requires resources beyond the scope of the school and most families. This point is reiterated by Dettmer, Thurston, and Dyck (2005):

*The general public in the new millennium is becoming more and more aware that teaching is not just a responsibility of professional educators within the school's walls. Community members and resource personnel beyond school walls are needed as collaborators and team members to help in planning and directing rich, authentic learning experiences for students. (p.45)*

Though collaboration can result in positive outcomes, achieving such goals may not always be simple as the factors that can hinder or enhance collaborative relationships are vast and complex.

### Barriers

Majumdar's (2006) literature review of collaboration among government agencies

indicates that though there are numerous impediments to collaboration, a major factor is the absence of genuine willingness on the part of persons in agencies to work closely with one another. When historical tensions or ideological differences exist this can result in adversarial relationships that preclude collaboration. Of a similar vein is what is known as *turf issues* – when collaborators are reluctant to relinquish what they consider to be their territory (Daka-Mulwanda et al., 1995). Collaborative efforts may also fail due to lack of trust, lack of open communication, and individuals working from a range of professions and agencies differing in training and jargon (Dunkle, 1993, 1994; Gray, 1995; Kusserow, 1991; Sarason et al., 1977 cited in Galvin, 1998). In relation to the education sector McCartney (1999) examined the barriers to collaboration between speech and language therapists (SLTs) and teachers under the following four headings: 1) functions; 2) structures; 3) process; and 4) systems-environment. A key difference highlighted by the author was that, in the United Kingdom, teachers were based in the education system and SLTs were based in the health system. In New Zealand, SLTs who work in schools are located within the education system. Further barriers to collaboration included children being selected for help by one service but not the other, where SLTs and teachers have differing ideas about the underlying nature of the collaborative relationship, lack of understanding about each other's working context, and how services were made available to clients by each institution. In meeting the needs of all their students, schools will often require the services of external agencies. McCartney (1999) suggests that by clarifying the assumptions and practices of each profession at the outset may assist in fostering a collaborative relationship among the groups.

One of the key relationships schools can foster for improving student outcomes is collaboration with parents. As parents have a significant role in their child's wellbeing and advocating for their needs, a positive relationship between school and parents is crucial. Bull, Brooking, and Campbell's (2008) research project investigated the key elements of successful home-school partnerships and will be examined in the section *enablers*. The Education Review Office (ERO) (2008) also conducted an evaluation

examining schools' engagement with parents, whanau, and communities. One of the areas which ERO (2008) investigated was the challenges facing these partnerships. For the schools, the most significant barrier to collaboration between parents, whanau, and communities was finding ways to involve and engage all these groups. For parents, whanau, and communities the most significant barriers to collaboration were living some distance from the school, not feeling at ease in their child's school environment, developing and maintaining effective communication with the school, and having the time to sustain engagement. As McCartney (1999) noted, clarifying the assumptions and practices of each profession at the outset may assist in fostering a collaborative relationship between one another. ERO (2008) offer similar advice, "knowing what the barriers are for parents and for schools and working collaboratively to address and overcome these can lead to more positive engagement" (p.48).

### Enablers

Majumdar (2006) considered the key element of effective collaboration to be a commitment on the part of participating organisations to mutual understanding, respect and trust. Factors that characterise successful collaboration included: strong, shared leadership; participative decision making; open and frequent communication; and complementary in terms of resources and skills (Majumdar, 2006).

Many fields, such as education, health and social welfare, espouse multidisciplinary collaboration in order to provide high quality services. Hinshaw and DeLeon (1995), commenting on the health system in the United States, defined multidisciplinary collaboration as experts from different disciplines working together, such as psychologists, nurses, and physicians. Several characteristics underpin effective collaborative relationships according to Hinshaw and DeLeon (1995): merging of expertise, division of labour, collegueship, and distribution of power. The merging of expertise allows common problems to be considered with a wealth of information due to the knowledge individuals bring with them from a range of disciplines. Division of labour means that when a decision is to be made, the individual with the specific area

of expertise and interest assumes leadership, a concept known as situational leadership. Collegueship is the support that members of a collaborative team provide one another. Distribution of power is the equitable distribution of power and influence among members of the team. On average the expertise of each member will be expected at some stage in the collaborative process meaning that power, responsibility, and rewards are shared equally (Hinshaw & DeLeon, 1995).

Successful collaborative relationships also require each individual to display a number of personal characteristics. These characteristics include: understanding multiple perspectives, ability to envisage the collaborative aim/s of the group, willingness to share one's expertise, being flexible and reliable, the ability to provide systematic reviews and constructive criticism of the team's progress, in addition to being able to accept criticism and suggestions (Hinshaw & DeLeon, 1995). The factors which Hinshaw and DeLeon (1995) considered to be crucial for the success of multidisciplinary professional collaboration in the medical field can also be found in the education sector, as noted in the following case studies examining school-community collaboration and school-home collaboration.

Sanders and Harvey (2002) case study examined the factors that developed and supported effective school-community collaboration. The study involved one urban elementary school located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States and the relationship with 10 of the school's community partners. Interviews were conducted with each of the school's community partners, students, parents, and the departing principal and incoming principal. The authors identified four key factors which lead to successful school-community collaboration. These factors were (1) the school's commitment to learning; (2) the principal's support and vision for community involvement; (3) the school's receptivity and openness to community involvement; and (4) the school's willingness to engage in two-way communication with potential community partners about their level and kind of involvement. Having established on-going collaborative community partnerships supports the school's efforts in providing

its students with a nurturing learning environment. Bull et al.'s (2008) research project investigated the key elements of successful home-school partnerships, elements which are consistent with other positive working collaborative relationships. The authors reviewed international and New Zealand literature in addition to conducting their own empirical research consisting of seven New Zealand case studies. Seven key features were identified by the authors as contributing to successful home-school partnerships, these were: (1) relationships are collaborative and mutually respectful; (2) are multi-dimensional, and responsive to community needs; (3) are planned for; embedded within whole school development plans; well resourced and regularly reviewed; (4) are goal oriented and focused on learning; (5) effective parental engagement happens largely at home; (6) there is timely two-way communication between school and parents; and (7) building successful partnerships takes time and commitment (p.6-7). From the case study schools nearly all the participants considered the principal to be a key player in the establishment of successful partnerships.

Majumdar (2006) also identified the following factors as characterising successful collaboration: strong, shared leadership; participative decision making; open and frequent communication; and complementary in terms of resources and skills. Each of the previously mentioned case studies from both the medical and education sectors highlighted these factors within their respective institutions.

#### *The Ministry of Education (MoE)*

The New Zealand MoE has recognised the importance of collaboration between the education sector and other agencies as highlighted in the following two documents. First, is the MoE's review of Special Education 2010 (Ministry of Education, 2010a) which called for feedback on the best way to support students with special education needs. The document considers students with special needs as those who have a physical impairment, hearing or vision difficulties, struggle with learning, communication and interpersonal skills, or a learning disability. One of the key questions asked in the review was how services could be better coordinated in meeting

the needs of such students and their families. Second, the MoE produced the teacher resource 'About Dyslexia' (Ministry of Education, 2008) following the official recognition of dyslexia in 2007 (Ministry of Education, 2007; Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand, 2010). One section of the resource is dedicated to 'Setting up for success: working together', referring to the need for collaboration between individuals (school staff, parents, specialist teachers) to support students. The document notes that the school has primary responsibility in meeting the educational needs of all students. When a teacher identifies a child as needing support they may turn to other members of the staff such as the Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO), School Literacy Leader, or the Reading Recovery teacher. However, some parents may seek support for their child from external agencies, such as SPELD, and likewise the school may need to make a referral to an external agency which should be made according to the school's established policies and procedures. A key factor acknowledged by the MoE is the need for a long-term cooperative effort between the school and families in meeting the needs of students with dyslexia (Ministry of Education, 2008).

## **Services for Learning and Contracting**

### *Remedial Reading Services*

For those students at the lower end of the literacy achievement scale schools may implement a number of in-house strategies such as one-to-one assistance with a teacher aide. When a student requires further assistance to address their reading difficulties schools may select from two government-funded national programmes to cater for the needs of such children, Reading Recovery and Resource Teachers of Literacy (RT:Lit) (Greaney, 2002). Reading Recovery and RT:Lits are the second and third components respectively of the Ministry of Education's three streams of literacy teaching and interventions (Ministry of Education, 2010b). The diagram below outlines the three streams:

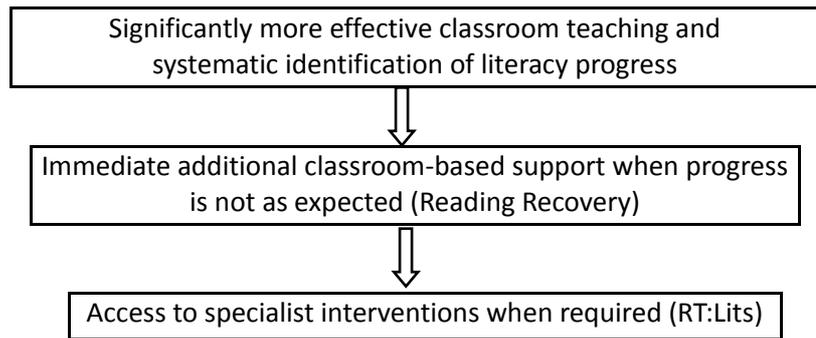


Figure 1. Ministry of Education's three streams of literacy teaching and interventions.

### *Reading Recovery (RR)*

Reading Recovery is a remedial reading programme developed in New Zealand, to help children who are experiencing literacy learning difficulties after a year of formal reading instruction (Tunmer & Chapman, 2003). Reading Recovery was developed by Marie Clay in the 1970s and has been available in many New Zealand primary schools since the early 1980s (Reynolds & Wheldall, 2007; Greaney, 2002). Clay envisaged Reading Recovery as an early intervention strategy that involved the extension of existing whole-language approaches to the individual tuition of young children identified as having difficulties with reading (Openshaw, 2002). The programme involves one-to-one tutoring by specially trained teachers for 30 minutes daily for between 12 and 20 weeks (Greaney, 2002). The Reading Recovery programme has been widely reported as an effective intervention and has been adopted by school systems in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Australia. Conversely, there are many studies questioning if the programme is as effective as it is claimed to be (Reynolds & Wheldall, 2007). While Reading Recovery has helped many children to learn to read, the system under which it operated appears to have prevented the benefits of the programme to be accessed by a large number of children.

### *Resource Teachers of Literacy (RT:Lits)*

Resource Teachers of Literacy (RT:Lits) are specialist teachers who provide intensive tutoring for students experiencing literacy difficulties, and also work in an advisory role for a number of schools within a cluster. As of 2007 there were 109 RT:Lit positions in

the country with a total of 4,126 students receiving support in this year. Of these students only 44% (n=1796) received direct support, namely individual tuition only (Lee, 2009a; Greaney, 2002).

#### *Schools Access to Reading Recovery and RT:Lits*

In 2008, two-thirds (66%) of all primary schools offered Reading Recovery (Lee, 2009b). Selection criteria for acceptance to the RR programme is on the basis of achievement from the 6-Year net observation survey. It is usual for the lowest-scoring students to be selected for the RR intervention (Greaney, 2002). The MoE encourages schools to offer RR and provides staffing to support schools to offer the programme.

Although RR is a government-funded national programme there are still a considerable number of schools that do not implement the Reading Recovery programme for numerous reasons. The reasons schools may not use RR include lack of needs, costs, availability of release teachers and distance of the school from a RR training centre (Greaney, 2002).

Access to a RT:Lit requires the school to make a referral from which the management committee collectively decide who will be enrolled on each RT:Lits programme. Students typically spend between 10 and 20 weeks on an RT:Lit programme, although some do continue for up to a year (Ministry of Education, 2010c; Greaney, 2002). In 2008, 57% of RR students were classified as having successfully discontinued their series of lessons by the end of the year. However, almost one in ten (9%) of students were referred on for specialist help or long-term support (Lee, 2009b).

Reading Recovery and RT:Lits provide valuable intervention services to a number of New Zealand school children requiring assistance with their literacy skills. However, students may not be able to access these programmes due to availability and/or eligibility issues. Furthermore is the issue of those students who are not recognised by the school as needing literacy assistance and those who despite receiving intervention

services make minimal progress. It is often due to one or more of these reasons that the demand for SPELD services exists.

### *The Demand for SPELD Services*

It is generally through the initiation of a parent(s) seeking SPELD services that such a relationship even exists between SPELD teacher and school. Home-school partnerships have been reviewed earlier in this chapter but it is important to examine the role of the parents in the context of the unique three-way relationship between parents, school, and SPELD.

As Brooking and Hodgen (2010) found in their evaluation of SPELD the majority of occasions where a child receives SPELD tutoring is due to parent initiation. "The most common way schools became involved with SPELD (46 percent) was when parents informed them they had already requested SPELD's help for their child" (p.9). The parent has felt their concerns are ignored by the school and hence will independently look to other services to meet their child's needs. As stated by the Mother of a 12 year old girl, "I struggle with not being taken seriously by the school. They don't think she has a problem, especially when she acts like a bright kid" (Brooking & Rowlands, 2009, p.11).

These concerns are reiterated in Malekoff, Johnson, and Klappersack's (1991) research which examined the collaborative relationship between parents and professionals in regards to children with learning difficulties.

*The most frequent painful response had to do with the difficulty in getting the child appropriate help, the school's denial of parental suspicions of problems, and the 'time wasted' between when the parent raised the possibility of the child's needing special help and when the child actually began to receive it.*  
(Malekoff et al., 1991, p.6).

For parents of children with learning difficulties SPELD assessment can often be the first sign of recognition that their concerns are warranted (Brooking & Rowlands, 2009). When Malekoff et al.'s (1991) study asked parents the most positive aspect of their child's situation "the overwhelming positive response was parents' relief at finally having some institutional recognition that their child had more than an adjustment or emotional problem. This information allowed parents to negotiate effectively with the school on the child's behalf" (Malekoff et al., 1991, p.6).

### **Private Tutoring**

When students with reading difficulties are unable to receive intervention services or the services they do receive are perceived by the parents to be inadequate they may then turn to private tutoring:

*In the UK, the school inspection system maintains standards across the country and this is likely to contribute to a lower overall demand for tutoring.*

*Nevertheless, students may seek tutoring in subjects they perceive to be poorly taught in school. (Ireson, 2004, p.114).*

Private tutoring has grown to become a vast enterprise (Bray, 2007). Bray and Kwok (2003) define private supplementary tutoring as "tutoring in academic subjects which is provided by the tutors for financial gain and which is additional to the provision by mainstream schooling" (p.612). For students with learning disabilities one-to-one tutoring provides a programme that is flexible and tailored to their specific needs (Ireson, 2004).

### **Effectiveness of private tutoring**

Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes and Moody (2000) conducted a meta-analysis examining the effectiveness of one-to-one tutoring programmes for students at risk of reading failure and found that programmes that were well-designed and reliably implemented can make a substantial contribution to improved reading outcomes. For students

experiencing severe difficulty in reading, such tutoring programmes might be enough to allow them to keep up with classroom instruction and to avoid academic failure. However, the effectiveness of these programmes may not sufficiently raise performance to within the average range for a grade level or to eliminate the need for sustained support beyond the intervention timeframe (Elbaum et al., 2000).

For a one-to-one tutoring programme in reading to be successful requires a number of curriculum, instruction and professional development features to be present. Research findings suggest that those programmes which are comprehensive, individualised, intensive, consistent with classroom instruction, and taught by a trained professional are likely to be the most effective (Wasik & Slavin, 1993). Other features, such as group size and quality of instruction, warrant further investigation to determine what impact it may have on programme effectiveness.

For children who receive private tutoring this may be done completely independent of the school. However, there may be instances when the external agency, private tutoring service such as SPELD in this instance, wants to work with the school to best meet the needs of the student.

### **Specific Learning Disabilities Federation (SPELD)**

#### *Background of the Organisation*

SPELD is one of many world-wide, not-for-profit voluntary organisations dedicated to helping those with SLDs (Buchanan, 1996; Brooking & Rowlands, 2009; Chapman, 1992). Originally known as the Dyslexia Association of N.Z. (Inc.) it was renamed SPELD in 1973 as it was considered to cover a wider area of need (Buchanan, 1996; SPELD, 1994). SPELD was also the name of the equivalent Australian organisation which was founded in 1968 in New South Wales (The Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 2000).

One of the main aims of SPELD NZ, since its first association was established in 1971, has been to raise awareness of learning disabilities (LDs) in the educational, political, and general public sectors (Buchanan, 1996; Chapman, Tunmer, & Allen, 2003; Chapman, 1992). SPELD has continuously made attempts to have SLDs recognised in legislation and along with it the provision of remedial services in schools for students with LD (Chapman et al., 2003; Chapman, 1992).

### Services SPELD Offers

SPELD New Zealand provides a number of services including support and information about dyslexia and SLDs, assessment and private one-to-one tutoring of individuals with dyslexia or other SLDs, and training courses approved by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) (SPELD, 2010; Chapman et al., 2003; Brooking & Rowlands, 2009). Given that one of SPELD's key focuses is to support those with SLDs it is important to examine what SLDs are and how such difficulties arise.

### Learning Disabilities

Learning disability (LD) is a general category of special education, as opposed to a single disorder, and consists of disabilities in any of the following seven areas: (1) listening, (2) speaking, (3) basic reading skills, (4) reading comprehension, (5) written expression, (6) mathematics calculation, and (7) mathematical reasoning (Lyon, 1996). Individuals are excluded from a specific learning disability label if sensory/emotional/neurological factors are identified as a cause leading to the learning difficulties they are experiencing. Such difficulties are specified as those of visual, hearing, or motor impairment, emotional and behavioural problems, and neurological impairments resulting from injury or illness, low ability, and economic, cultural or environmental disadvantage (Catts & Kamhi, 2005; NZ RTLB Association and SPELD NZ Incorporated, 2010). Reading disability or dyslexia are often considered synonymous with LD which they are not (Lyon, 1996, p.49; Lyon, Shaywitz, & Shaywitz, 2003). However, the majority of individuals with a LD have their primary deficits in reading and most of the literature concerning LDs relates to reading disabilities (Lyon, 1996).

### **Private Tutoring and the SPELD Organisation**

The SPELD NZ organisation was established as a private tutoring service that works outside of school hours and is paid for by the parents. As Brooking & Rowlands (2009) report most SPELD teachers teach from within their own homes tutoring students before or after school. However, some SPELD tutors currently teach during school hours and in many instances, within the school itself. Such arrangements involve a contract between the parents who pay the SPELD tutors, it does not involve any financial transactions between the school and the SPELD tutor (Brooking & Rowlands, 2009; SPELD, 1994). Legally, students are allowed to attend outside tuition during school hours as noted in the Education Act (1989). The Act allows, as written in a letter by the then Education Minister Lockwood Smith to SPELD's Political Liaison Officer June Bennett, this will now allow principals and boards of trustees greater flexibility to release students to attend outside tuition during school hours, and to receive assistance from organisations such as SPELD (Buchanan, 1996). As the SPELD organisation moves from working outside of the schools to within them a range of issues arise in regards to the working relationship between SPELD and schools.

### **Summary**

This review has identified the need to understand the relationship between SPELD and schools and has discussed the importance of collaboration in effective relationships between agencies. The present study will contribute to understanding of SPELD teacher/classroom teacher relationships by examining the nature of the reported experience of SPELD teachers and teachers in schools.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Conceptual Framework**

The aim of this study is to understand the relationship between SPELD teachers and classroom teachers from the Wellington region. In order to obtain relevant information to address this question this thesis followed a qualitative research design with a case study approach to data collection.

### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is a means for exploring the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009). A qualitative approach was desirable for this research as the focus was to understand the meaning that the participants gave to the relationship between SPELD and schools at both the individual level, and as a collective (classroom teachers; SPELD teachers). Secondly, given that the relationship between SPELD teachers and classroom teachers is complex, qualitative research is again deemed desirable as it attempts to highlight the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation (Creswell, 2009). And thirdly, qualitative research allows the researcher to investigate small areas in a great deal of depth which was preferable for this research project.

The two reports which inform this study (Brooking & Rowlands, 2009; Brooking & Hodgen, 2010) implemented a multi-method design involving both qualitative and quantitative methods on a national scale. This thesis has the advantage of utilising nationwide research findings (coverage) to form the background from which a more in-depth case study was conducted involving selected schools and SPELD teachers.

### **Case Studies**

A case study approach is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a programme, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bound by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data

collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 2009). A case study approach was selected for this research project as it enabled the relationship between individuals, and the institutions for which they work, to be explored in depth.

Somekh and Lewin (2005) highlight that with case study work decisions need to be made about which cases to select for study, where and how boundaries are to be drawn, how much time can be allocated to fieldwork, and what research methods are to be implemented. In this study these issues were determined largely by pragmatic constraints. With the researcher located in Wellington the decision was made to restrict data collection to within this geographical location. This was also influenced by time constraints, specifically the amount of time the researcher could dedicate to conducting one-on-one interviews while also taking into account the time needed to transcribe and analyse all the participant's transcripts. Time constraints were also a large factor in participants' willingness to participate in the research. Elicker, McConnell, and Hall (2010) investigated the reasons why college students enrolled in an introductory psychology course chose not to participate in research, in spite of the potential to earn extra credit. Over half of the students noted the reason for non-participation in research was due to time and scheduling conflicts (55.7%), specifically no time or too busy (47.8%) These findings are applicable to the present study as time constraints were one factor impacting on who would participate in this research. As SPELD teachers can be classified as self-employed, their involvement in the research was more likely given the flexibility some had to take time out to be interviewed. Classroom teachers had greater restrictions on if and when they could meet. The timing of the classroom teacher interviews fell in the last week of term 3 and the first week of the school holidays which was to the researcher's advantage. Four of the six school participant interviews were conducted during the school holiday period.

A key issue in case study concerns depth versus coverage, and within the logic of a case study approach, the recommended choice is always depth (Somekh and Lewin, 2005).

To ensure that the findings of this study are based on sufficient depth, interview questions were left open so that participants had the opportunity during the semi-structured interviews to share a range of aspects of their experience of the relationship between the two groups. In addition, questions arising from the participants' answers were pursued. In this study, breadth of coverage was also important and this was promoted through the inclusion of questions that considered both supports and barriers to a positive relationship between the groups. It is anticipated that the capacity to compare information within the groups will provide richer data. As Somekh and Lewin (2005) noted:

*It is always helpful to compare and contrast across cases if possible and investigate the range of possible experience within a programme, for example studying a 'good' apparently successful example of a new social programme, and a 'bad' apparently unsuccessful example. (p.35).*

## **Research Procedures**

### Aim of the Study

To understand the relationship between SPELD and selected schools in New Zealand.

### Research Questions

1. What supports SPELD and schools to work together?
2. What factors restrict the relationship between SPELD and schools?
3. How can collaboration between SPELD and schools be enhanced?

### Participants

The participants in this study consisted of six school personnel and five SPELD teachers all from the Wellington region. The SPELD participants were all over 45 years of age. Two of the SPELD participants were new to SPELD tutoring and the other three SPELD participants had been SPELD tutoring for between 8 and 16 years. The school

participants consisted of five classroom teachers and one deputy principal. Each school participant had between 5 to 26 years of teaching experience. The school participants had been working at their respective schools for between 1 year and 20+ years. The four schools which the school participants were currently working included three public schools and one private school. Three of the schools were decile 10 and one of the schools a decile three. The student roll of these schools ranged from 190-700 pupils. This information was obtained from Education Review Office reports of the schools all conducted in 2008.

## **Data Collection**

### *Stage One: Access to SPELD participants*

The researcher contacted the SPELD Wellington Branch President who agreed to send an email to SPELD teachers, on the researcher's behalf, requesting their participation for the research. Five SPELD teachers offered to participate and all five were telephoned to discuss the details of the study, consent procedures, and ethical guidelines. Participants were also provided with an information sheet, consent form, and transcript release form (see appendices A, B, & C). Interviews with three of the five SPELD teachers were conducted in person at their respective homes. Interviews with the other two SPELD teachers were conducted via telephone. SPELD teacher interviews took between one to two hours.

### *Stage Two: Access to Schools*

The researcher requested to the five SPELD teachers interviewed to provide the names of schools where students they were currently tutoring attended. An email was sent to 11 school principals requesting permission for their classroom teachers to participate in the research. Email details were obtained from school websites. Telephone calls were then made following up the email. Verbal consent was obtained from senior management staff at five schools allowing the researcher to contact individual school staff members.

### Stage Three: Access to School Participants

The researcher sent emails to staff members at the five schools from which six individuals from four schools agreed to participate. Interviews were conducted in person at each of the school participant's respective schools. Two of the interviews were conducted with an individual staff member with the other two interviews being conducted with two staff members present. Participants were provided with an information sheet, consent form, and transcript release form (see appendices A, B, & C) and the details of the study, consent procedures, and ethical guidelines were discussed. School teacher interviews took between 25-50 minutes. All interviews, both SPELD and school teachers, were recorded on a dictaphone. It was emphasised to all participants that their participation in the study would remain confidential and names of individuals and schools would not be identified.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis of the data was completed through a six-step process. Step one involved the collection of raw data by recording the interviews on a dictaphone and the researcher transcribing each interview.

Step two required the data to be organised and prepared. The transcribed interviews were separated into the two participant groups – SPELD and schools. The data from the interviews was then organised under each interview question (Appendix D). Additional information that was provided by the participants but unrelated to the specific interview questions was placed in a separate category.

The third step entailed the researcher reading through all the data. Initial reading of the data was done for familiarisation and no analysis was conducted at this stage.

Step four was coding the data. Allocating codes to the data was implemented through two stages. The initial coding stage looked for general descriptions. This allowed the data to be placed into broad categories from which the second stage analysis involved

coding of themes and placing data into more specific categories.

Examining the data to reveal interrelating themes and descriptions was the fifth step. Data was analysed across questions as a means to highlight themes that were consistent and also inconsistent across interviews and across the two participant groups.

The sixth and final step required the researcher to interpret the meaning of themes and descriptions and relating these back to the research literature identified in Chapter Two: Literature Review.

The process for data analysis is outlined in the diagram below:

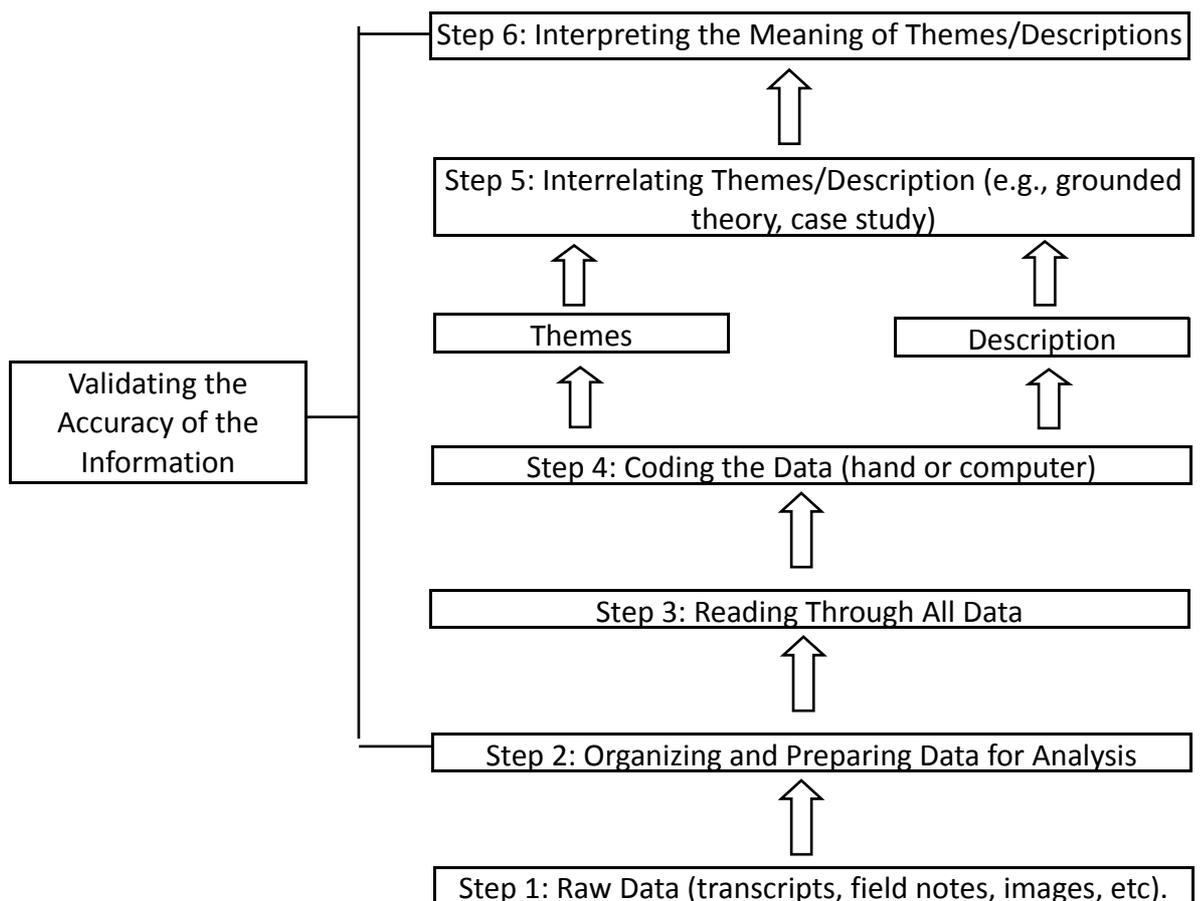


Figure 2. Data analysis in qualitative research (Creswell, 2009, p.185).

## **Ethical Considerations**

### *Checking for Ethical Approval*

Ethical issues present in the study were analysed in four stages. Firstly, the *Massey University Screening Questionnaire to Determine the Approval Procedure* (Massey University, 2009) was completed and no significant issues arose. Secondly, the *Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants* (Massey University, 2010a) was read and consideration was given to sections of the code which were directly applicable to this research. Thirdly, the *Massey University Human Ethics Application* (Massey University, 2010b) was reviewed to allow for a more detailed analysis of ethical issues in this project. The project did not present with major risk factors. And fourthly, the *New Zealand Psychologist's Code of Ethics* (Code of Ethics Review Group, 2002) was reviewed and consideration was given to sections of the code which were directly applicable to this research. This was important as this thesis was being completed as part of the requirements for the Educational Psychology Programme.

### *Specific factors requiring consideration*

*Informed and Voluntary Consent.* Participants were provided with an information sheet and the details of the study, consent procedures, and ethical guidelines were discussed (see appendices A, B, & C).

*Respect for Privacy and Confidentiality.* Safeguards were put in place to maintain the confidentiality of all the participants. Schools and individuals were not named in any reports and care was taken when describing background information that may identify them. Participants signed a transcript release form (Appendix C) after having been given the opportunity to read their transcripts and make amendments as they deemed necessary.

*Storage/Archiving/Disposal of Data.* The transcribed interviews were stored on a laptop which required a password to access. Recordings of the interviews were erased following the submission of the thesis. Consent forms were stored in a locked drawer in

the researcher's office.

*Minimisation of Risk of Harm.* As the publication of findings from the study has the potential to harm relationships between SPELD teachers and school personnel care was taken with the presentation of results to maintain participant anonymity.

*Researcher Bias.* It was important to address the researcher's own position and how partiality was maintained. The researcher considered herself to be in a unique position for this research as she is a primary school teacher, a past employee of NZCER who was involved in the data analysis process of the 2010 SPELD report, and has a familial relationship with a SPELD teacher. Given her past involvement in SPELD measures were taken to rectify any unintentional assumptions or judgements she made. The researcher recognised what biases she may hold then consciously worked towards being as objective and neutral as possible in regards to all components of the research project. Both supervisors played a key role in ensuring the researcher's objectivity was being actively practiced. The researcher also ensured she complied with the Massey University Code of Ethics and the New Zealand Psychologist's Code of Ethics to which she was bound.

#### *Ethical Notification*

Having completed these stages a 'Notification of Low Risk Research/Evaluation involving Human Participants' application was completed. The Low Risk Notification was received and accepted on 19 April 2010 by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC).

## **Chapter Four: Results**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the results of the interviews conducted with the SPELD teachers and classroom teachers. The results are presented in two sections. The first section reports the findings of the SPELD teacher interviews. The second section reports the findings of the classroom teacher interviews. Both sections are organised by question as they were asked in the interview schedules (Appendix D). The responses to the demographic questions asked of all the participants are discussed in Chapter Three: Methodology, under the *participant* heading.

### **SPELD Teachers**

#### **1) How did student x get referred to you?**

Half of the student referrals were through the SPELD organisation. In 25% of cases a referral was received from a classroom teacher at one of the schools the SPELD teacher was already working at. In one instance a referral had been made from an educational psychologist to the SPELD organisation. One SPELD teacher noted that sometimes students will be referred to them following discussions between parents, one of whom had a child receiving SPELD tutoring:

*I was working with one student and his best friend's mother saw the change in him and wanted the same sort of change for her son and I think that's a fairly common sort of scenario.*

#### **2) Where do you tutor student x?**

Three of the SPELD teachers teach in the particular student's school with the remaining two SPELD teachers tutoring from their own homes.

#### **3) Do you consider to have a working relationship between the classroom teacher and yourself?**

The SPELD participants were divided on this question. Two of the participants considered themselves to have a very good relationship with the classroom teacher of one of their students, as highlighted in the following statement:

*Yes I do. The teacher is fantastic and youngish. Very open. Not defensive. We have met once or twice after school. She has been very supportive and very open. She is probably one of the better ones.*

Three of the SPELD teachers considered the classroom teacher to have accepted an arrangement with the student being taken out of the class during school hours but in regards to a *working* relationship often this allowance was the extent the classroom teacher was prepared to go, as noted by one of the SPELD teachers:

*We've had meetings that she's agreed to come to and the parents and I have thought that things were sorted but nothing happened on her part, so I have now come to the conclusion that the most I can expect from her is an acceptance of the time out of the classroom and that's it.*

#### 4) What can you say about the relationship with the classroom teacher?

The responses to this question were varied and a number of positive and negative aspects were discussed by the SPELD participants. The differences between schools and individual classroom teachers that were raised in response to the previous question were again highlighted:

*Relationships vary between teachers. Some are very open, others aren't. Most schools are ok with me going in. Some are still very anti-SPELD, they think it should happen after school.*

*It's been very welcoming and open and even though one of the teachers has not shown as being approachable.*

Some of the SPELD teachers discussed the difficulties in working with classroom teachers on their 'territory'.

*They are in charge of this child and somebody new is coming in and so it's like this balancing. It's a little bit of mana, I think you've got to be sensitive that you are not going to, you're not undermining.*

*What they've [the parents] expressed to me was that they were surprised that they [the classroom teachers] were a bit defensive when it was mentioned the student was going to get SPELD to come in, 'oh why would you do that?' And yet the teachers were the ones holding the meetings, showing concern, and asking questions which heightened the parents concern. The parents thought well we better be proactive and do something about it and then were surprised when the teachers were hesitant about it. That still goes on quite a bit.*

*Still that barrier there. See you as a threat. That still happens according to SPELD people that I've talked to.*

*Some [classroom teachers] are really defensive. Sometimes they are angry with the parents and that puts you in a difficult place.*

Despite difficulties they may be presented with, all the SPELD teachers discussed the importance of developing relationships with schools:

*What I noticed coming back to SPELD is they really are trying to work through the schools. Big emphasis in the training now. Encouraged to contact the school through the parent to build a relationship with the school so we can tutor in school time or take them out during school time. I believe it's working quite well for some people.*

However, many of the SPELD teachers still consider the relationship with the parents to be the priority.

4i) How do you establish the ways that you will work together?

Two of the SPELD teachers indicated that often they will ask the parent to contact the school on their behalf before contacting the classroom teacher:

*Before I start working with a child in the school environment I ask the parents to ok it with the school. They are the initial mediator. The parent has to be the one who instigates the meeting. We are employed by the parent.*

Other SPELD participants said they contacted the Principal and/or the classroom teacher directly. Initial contact with the classroom teacher involves setting a time to meet and to establish guidelines:

*Generally I say to the teachers I'll be guided by what you want me to do. Make it clear and clarify that I'm not doing more of what they're doing in the class. I say after a few weeks I'm happy to talk to you again. And then I usually have an exercise book which they [the students] bring each time. A way to show the teacher what we've done. I'll give a few recommendations. I'd rather keep the communication open.*

*I asked him [the classroom teacher] where our boundaries were, so how are we going to work together, and what ways would you like me to support him [the student] and I indicated that I would like to come in now and then and whether he was comfortable with that.*

4ii) How often do you communicate with the classroom teacher? Through what means?

Communication between the SPELD teachers and classroom teachers is largely done on an ad hoc basis. The SPELD teachers typically aim for an initial meeting to establish guidelines and communication following that meeting can vary. Most of the SPELD teachers commented that they will often speak with the classroom teachers when they happen to run into them otherwise communication is largely done via email, or the use of a student workbook where notes and examples of the student's work is included. One issue raised by a SPELD teacher was the extra work required when dealing with more than one classroom teacher:

*The difficult part that I have is that he's [student] got two teachers. For me that's added another challenge because they are different people, they work differently. So I'm actually going in-between the two and I've met both a couple of times. So what I've decided to do is when I've done some work with him is that I photocopy it and then given it to the teacher as a sample of expectations and the level of work he is able to achieve.*

4iii) Do you collaborate in regards to student x's learning goals and how they will be achieved?

One SPELD teacher acknowledged the value of collaboration as noted in the following quote:

*A few weeks into the term will ask if we can touch base. Backing up what she [the classroom teacher] can't do in the classroom. Complementing her. Checking in with one another. I try to do it with most of my teachers. It's usually pretty quick. Sometimes email works quite well but even that can be overwhelming. If you're on the same page its worth it's weight in gold. You need to know what it's like in the classroom.*

All of the SPELD teachers discussed how working collaboratively with the classroom teacher in regards to student's learning goals is not always easily achieved due to pragmatic constraints:

*Not nearly as much as would be useful. We just don't have time for doing that.*

*I must admit I did try initially. I did email my learning goals, term goals, and I asked for long term plans and things like this but then it just sort of fell apart a little bit. I do ask if there is something that I really need, like the first week of this term I sought her [classroom teacher] out and said 'Can I have long term planning particularly in language for this kid?' She was quite happy to do that for me. I've tried to help by doing some sort of extra work on the same area.*

4iv) Do you share resources?

All of the SPELD participants were decisive in responding with a “no” to this question. That is limited sharing of resources from the SPELD teachers to the schools and vice versa. Comments by two of the SPELD teachers was that SPELD is an independent organisation quite separate from schools and hence sharing of resources does not happen and nor do they expect it to happen. Though physical resources were often not shared, except for instances when a book might be lent to a teacher, other SPELD teachers noted that they will often offer suggestions of programmes or ideas that they have come across:

*Not necessarily sharing resources but have provided suggestions, ideas. For example a computer programme.*

5) What difficulties/barriers are impacting on you and the classroom teacher working together?

A number of consistent themes emerged from the SPELD teachers responses to this question. The barriers to collaboration included lack of time, lack of space, and resistance from a particular classroom teacher, or school in general, as highlighted in the following quotes:

*One in particular they said 'no we're not having SPELD in here at all'. They won't have me taking the student out of class, or working during school time simply because there's no space.*

*The teacher at that school is very welcoming and most of the teachers at that school are welcoming. Although having said that there is another student I was working with and the teacher has said point blank 'you are not taking her out of the classroom'.*

Some of the SPELD teachers discussed instances where initial resistance by a teacher or school was overcome:

*One school that categorically said no SPELD teachers in here, I got the distinct*

*impression that it was because they didn't like SPELD. That's only happened really with one school. There was another school fairly early in the piece, in my SPELD career, there was a really bolshie parent, and she demanded that school allow me to go in and work with the child. I made a point then of asking if I could stay for morning tea and talking to the classroom teacher and anyone else on the staff. Within a couple of terms the school were recommending that I take another couple of students.*

*In the early stages I recall a conversation where a teacher said something about inclusion policy not liking the student to be withdrawn. I just simply came back and said 'what about Reading Recovery?' They thought about it and thought perhaps it would be ok.*

One of the SPELD teachers discussed how a mother of a SPELD student suggested she (SPELD teacher) inform a school displaying resistance to SPELD tutoring during school hours that legally the parents have the right to withdraw children during schools hours for private tutoring:

*The mother of the child whose home I teach in said something similar to that about this other student. The student who won't be withdrawn I'll call T and the other mother said if T's mum went to the principal she could demand to let me work with that child. At that point I said, 'yes but what sort of friction and backlash is that going to cause?' It's probably better, particularly at this stage of the year to wait until she's in another teacher's classroom and then see what happens. Because there are so many little things that a school can do to make it difficult, from forgetting to pass on messages, even down to timetabling fun activities during that time. These are things that I have seen happening.*

Break-down in communication between the SPELD tutor and classroom teacher was an issue raised by another SPELD participant:

*Can be difficult when you arrive at the school for a lesson and they're [the class] going off to swimming. This is due to communication break-down.*

Other barriers to collaboration included:

*Lack of information about what dyslexia is. As a SPELD teacher you have to be careful how much you give them, and then them thinking that you think they're dummies. The issue is just the meetings. Initially we agreed she was going to do this, I was going to do that. My part happened. Her part didn't. Whatever was discussed in the meetings was then totally forgotten about.*

5i) What are your views about the strategies SPELD uses? Do you agree with them?

Some of the SPELD participants considered the strategies they use in tutoring to be a real strength of the programme, specifically the ability to tailor the programme to the individual child's needs:

*Yes I agree with SPELD's methods. A lot of people just think it's phonetics. People forget about phonemic awareness. I use variety, I'm not a one programme person. I use the basic priorities of what we need to do but from different resources so they've [the students] got practice in a variety of ways. Sometimes the kid loves it 'cause they don't think you're doing work. My basic philosophy. Some say SPELD should have a set method but you don't have to have one approach.*

*We have a very strong emphasis on phonemic awareness and phonological activities. That I see as being a particular strength. But I think the main strength I see is that we are not a 'one size fits all' group. Our bottom line is 'meet that student's needs the best way you can'. I think that is our strength because it gives us the flexibility to be inventive, innovative, to research, to find up to date knowledge and strategies. We don't get stuck in a rut so to speak.*

Not all of the responses to this question were quite as positive as highlighted by the comments of one SPELD participant:

*I had certainly moved towards the computerised stuff and it probably frustrates me that SPELD as an organisation hasn't moved there as well. I see the SPELD approach*

*works for someone who can spend 2 hours preparing for every 1 hour lesson which you can do if you have 2 or 3 students a week but if you have 15 then you have to have things much more streamlined and so you need programmes that you can slot the kids into and you know that they are really good programmes that work and then you've got something that your modifying the whole time and making individual.*

One issue that a SPELD teacher had with the strategies they use was insufficient training to competently plan and implement individualised tutoring programmes:

*It's hugely up to you what you do. It can be a bit daunting. I wasn't ready after the training at all. I felt that of the people that were in the course a lot of them were put off because they felt enough wasn't covered in the course. They didn't know enough. I did a lot of study myself and a lot more reading and I feel that I've come to grips with it. What I think is that you do need to bring more experts in.*

5ii) Do you think SPELD teachers have a place in mainstream education?

The responses from the SPELD teachers to whether they should belong in mainstream education varied across the spectrum from strongly agree to strongly disagree. All of the SPELD participants raised the issue of where they, as SPELD teachers, would fit in with programmes and specialists already working in the education system:

*I honestly don't. I think that the RTLBs in their beginning years concentrated on behaviour but are now looking at learning and they have also got the RT:Lits. So it would seem really strange to go with a different group. The only reason they would do it is we might be cheaper I don't know.*

*Mainstream? I don't know. Personally I don't see the Ministry ever using us like that [similar to how RR teachers or RT:Lits work] although I have seen a private school with a learning support teacher also use a SPELD teacher 2 and a half days a week as well. It would depend on the individual school. Some learning support teachers are really open to SPELD teachers. Still we go in we go out. It would be great if you had even a day in some schools but the reality is I doubt that would happen. There will never be a place*

*for one-on-one tutoring.*

*I very definitely do. I would like to see SPELD on a similar footing to Reading Recovery because there seems to be a bit of research to indicate that for dyslexic students the Reading Recovery programme doesn't work. So my dream would be to have all students screened for the possibility of being dyslexic and for those kids have them receive some sort of SPELD support leaving the Reading Recovery teachers to pick up those others who haven't succeeded.*

5iii) What are your views of the cost associated with SPELD assessments and subsequent tutoring?

The SPELD teachers acknowledged that the cost for tutoring, and assessment especially, could be a huge ask for some parents. Two of the SPELD participants discussed the need to keep costs down for parents yet at the same time the difficulty in the SPELD teachers being sufficiently paid for their work. The following quote from one SPELD teacher succinctly summarises the situation:

*What do I say? We sort of tread a very fine line because the parents pay. We can't charge what I see as our worth. We just can't do that because there is no way parents could afford it. To be fair, if there was government funding we would expect to be paid more. Overall there has to be some sort of balance. I'm just really aware that teachers get paid quite a bit more than we do. It's really hard and it would be good if there was some way that our charges could be reduced but I can't see how.*

6) What would support this relationship?

When asked what factors may support a SPELD/School relationship the SPELD teachers all tended to discuss difficulties they experienced from dealing with schools. Issues the SPELD teachers came across that were possibly restricting the relationship included lack of collegiality, the history of the SPELD organisation, and them versus us attitudes:

*Teachers have quite a strange attitude to other professionals. It's as if all consultants are money grabbing and whether we call ourselves consultants or being self-employed*

*probably means we're earning a third to a half of what we would earn if we were employed by a school fulltime.*

*It does seem to be a lack of collegiality with SPELD and to a large extent I think it might be history, that individual teachers have got individual stories about someone who was very insensitive and did all the wrong things and those stories live on and on. It's really hard to be seen as part of the team.*

The attitude of the school or the individuals within it could play a large part in supporting a SPELD/School relationship:

*I've been at IEP meetings where it has seemed to work. I've also been at an IEP meeting where the school deliberately don't want SPELD in the school but the parents insisted that I attend. The senior school person there would much prefer I wasn't there and we end up with anything I say ends up getting countered by 'oh but we do that' and you end up having to be so, so careful, because it seems that whenever I say something it's as if I'm saying that they don't do it. If I say I've found something and it works really well they may say 'but we use that all the time' and it may be true but it can be so hard to break that down. And so they can be quite exhausting and I do think what is the point sometimes? It is really hard to feel part of the team as equals sometimes.*

*At one time I had a really good relationship with their senior person who also was in charge of the special needs then she moved on to another position and the school then took a strong team approach, that they can do it and they don't need to get SPELD in.*

*I'm thinking of a couple of schools I go into where the principal is very welcoming and where the deputy or someone further down in the hierarchy is definitely not welcoming. It's sometimes difficult to get past the second in command.*

6i) Do you think the SPELD teachers should support a SPELD/School teacher relationship?

The SPELD teachers were unanimous in that they should be supporting a SPELD/School

relationship.

6ii) What role could the SPELD organisation play in developing relationships between the school and the SPELD organisation/teachers?

Many of the SPELD participants discussed that though more could be done at a national level the responsibility for building those relationships requires work at the ground level, from the individual SPELD teachers:

*I don't know what SPELD national realistically could do. To a large extent a good relationship is going to be built on an individual relationship rather than an organisational relationship. If you talk about an organisational body generally, you think of that body in terms of the people you know involved rather than what they do overall . So I think from that the best way to develop relationships is at the individual level.*

At the organisational level, some of the SPELD teachers considered the need for SPELD to have a greater business-minded mentality and greater promotion of their services:

*I think it's very much up to us as individual teachers. I think the organisation could do a lot more promotion. Talking from one of the people from Auckland, she's on the executive committee, she's into running SPELD as a business. Was very interesting, very onto it. She was the secretary of NZ SPELD. She was very onto it as a whole business venture and that is how their course is running.*

One SPELD teacher discussed the success of another organisation she worked for following the employment of a marketing expert. However, this quote also reflects a issue that is apparent across a number of factors within the SPELD organisation, funding:

*I have this parallel life because SPELD isn't fulltime I spend a lot of time with another organisation where we do a lot of volunteer work and we are often facing a lot of the same issues as SPELD are facing and we have addressed that by appointing a*

*marketing fundraising person for 6 months and that's made a huge difference. It's cost quite a lot of money but we decided that was our top priority. Whereas with SPELD we have SPELD tutors trying to do all these things but we haven't got the funding. Sometimes we get caught in this SPELD approach of not wanting to grow in case we can't meet the need so that's almost an attitude that will keep you small and if you're not growing you're probably going to be declining.*

## **Classroom Teachers**

### 1) What are your views about SPELD?

Most of the classroom teachers noted that they knew very little about SPELD and what SPELD tutors do as mentioned in the following statements:

*I still don't know enough. I probably should know more but I don't.*

*We don't see a lot of what she [the SPELD tutor] does although she does consult and say what would you like but largely it is to support the student through what she sees as the need as shown in the testing or whatever.*

One classroom teacher believed that academic improvements made by students receiving SPELD tutoring were limited:

*We don't see a lot of gain coming from SPELD into the children. I think it's because it's only a once a week programme. I think the parents like it because they feel like they are doing something for their children but academically we don't see a huge change as far as any improvement. I've had a child in my class last year that made very little progress that I noticed as a result of SPELD.*

Another classroom teacher reflected on the importance of a relationship between the school and the SPELD tutor. However they also acknowledged the difficulties in working with SPELD given they are a private organisation and accommodating requests to remove children during the day to receive SPELD tutoring:

*We have had quite a long association well not with SPELD as an organisation at all but just as SPELD teachers present themselves when they're working with students. We've tried to maintain good relationships. I know of schools where they won't entertain any sort of relationship at all but we are of the opinion that we are all trying to help our students and so we need to be a little bit accommodating but we also have to be mindful of the fact that they [SPELD] are a commercial operation and so I think it's quite hard to explain that to people when we know it's for the good of the students there's no doubt about that, but them coming in during the school day it can be actually problematic.*

1i) Do you consider the SPELD teacher to be an expert in the field of SLDs?

Half of the classroom teachers believed the SPELD teacher to be an expert in the field of SLDs, or at least expected them to be:

*I would assume she is an expert if she is in this position.*

The responses from other classroom teachers were not so definitive, and the following two quotes highlight the role the parents have in bringing the SPELD teacher into the school:

*I guess that's a role which we haven't really looked into. Most of the SPELD tutors that come in it's from parents, it's funded by parents, and it's pushed by parents.*

*I don't know whether you would regard her as an expert. I don't know what the qualifications are. This was someone who was brought into the school because the parents want this rather than something that has been generated by the school.*

1ii) Would you go to the SPELD teacher for advice? Why or why not?

Half of the classroom teachers do seek advice from the SPELD teacher. The responses from these teachers discussed how the SPELD teachers they worked with had in the past conducted a school-wide staff meeting about dyslexia, shared workbooks about students with dyslexia, and explained computer programmes.

The responses from the other classroom teachers was that they have not, and would not, go to the SPELD teacher for advice. The reasons given for not seeking out a SPELD teacher's advice was due to others being more readily available and a lack of working relationship with that specific SPELD teacher:

*I guess no because we don't see them that often. They're in once a week for 40 minutes it's not as if we're going to say you're an expert on that child.*

2) Do you know the schools' position with regard to SPELD? If so, what is this?

All the classroom teachers provided detailed explanations in response to this question. The school participants considered their schools to be open to working with SPELD but in what capacity varied between schools:

*We're open to SPELD. We do have to look at timetables, we have to look at what's going on with that class for the week. We will say yes you can use this time or no you can't. What we normally try and do is not say no, no, no, we try to accommodate and find that balance. That's with parents, with SPELD.*

*I think because she [SPELD teacher] has had a history with the school for 6 or so years I guess the school is open to that. I don't know of any specific policies that says we will admit the SPELD teacher but she does use our facilities. She's got a room and uses photocopying and things like that.*

*I think the school has been accepting is probably the word that I would put on it largely because of the relationship with this particular parent who insists that her child continues with SPELD tutoring.*

Though the question was asking about the schools' position with regard to SPELD a number of other issues were raised by the participants including barriers to collaboration, the pragmatics of having a SPELD teacher tutoring within the school, and the three-way relationship between school, SPELD, and parent:

*I think from the original stance we had stated this is our premises but then we looked at a couple of cases where it would have worked and worked with the parents and the SPELD tutor and said look we've got this space available if you're going to be in during this time. We did reach an agreement. What we've tried to be very careful of is setting up that expectation that you can come into the school and use our premises because we don't want that expectation that they should be obliged to come in because you're an outside agency you're not a school government-funded agency, you're an agency which is making profit. You're trying to do the best for your children I understand that but you're not giving anything back to us as a non-profit agency. So it's a really difficult clash that you can have.*

*We are more than happy for any student to get whatever they need outside school but we do have a difficulty with tutors coming into school and it's not because it's a philosophical opposition to the programme it's just because we're trying to get into the business of running our day-to-day programmes. We often get these compromising positions as schools and it can be very difficult to manage because the SPELD teacher is doing what the parents require, she's being paid by the parent and yet we are trying to see this whole child and what her needs are across the board.*

*She [SPELD teacher] is the only one that comes in and I'm going to have to say to her unless there is a good rationale that we are starting to get a lot of requests for all sorts of tutors coming into the school and it's just not a path that the Principal wants to go down. I suppose what we'll have to do is maybe formulate some sort of policy. Set out that we are prepared to set up meetings, we are prepared for the SPELD teacher to come along to goal setting because these are all processes that we have in place anyway, very happy to see the reports, love to see the recommendations so on and so forth but it will have to be done outside of school.*

*3) Do you consider there to be a working relationship between the SPELD teacher and yourself?*

As highlighted in the previous question the school participants did consider their schools to be open to working with SPELD but as far as a working relationship went this was a lot more limited for four of the classroom teachers.

*I think there is with the tutor as much as we can be. I think we are getting better but it's always that barrier of private versus public sector.*

*I would say that it's limited. And it would be at our insistence. Up until now it has been whatever that teacher has decided what she thinks she needs rather than what we think she needs and I think that there needs to be a lot more cohesion between the SPELD teachers and the classroom teachers to support the total learning.*

*I think that in some ways we have to. I mean we would look very silly to the parents if we didn't at least accommodate that but as students go further up the school it's harder to do that as they can have 8-10 different teachers, how do you manage that then? That's when it becomes a bit tricky actually.*

#### 4) What can you say about the relationship with the SPELD teacher?

The responses to this question fall under sub-sections of question 4.

##### 4i) How do you establish the ways that you will work together?

For classroom teachers at two of the schools there was no negotiation between themselves and the SPELD teacher to establish the ways they would work together. Rather they were told this was the situation and subsequently would need to accommodate the SPELD teacher:

*She told us. There was no negotiation. It was, this is the time that I can come in for this student and that's something I find a little bit difficult because this is a private organisation with an arrangement with the parent but the school is supposed to kind of fit in with this system. If it's totally outside of school and it's been done at home then we have nothing to do with it but when it's actually impacting on classroom time and with that student's learning then I think there needs to be as you say a lot more transparency with the whole thing and at the moment we don't feel that we're actually getting that.*

Classroom teachers at other schools noted that they had an initial meeting with the

SPELD teacher, and often with the parents as well to establish guidelines. If a meeting could not be held at the outset then attempts would be made to meet at a later date.

*Not at the beginning but along the track. She [SPELD teacher] was unable to make the first meeting we had with our own literacy specialist.*

One classroom teacher discussed how expectations would be set between the school and the SPELD teacher. In this statement the issue of finding a time to meet and the number of meetings school teachers already attend is noted:

*At the start we said to them what are you working on, what is your focus, this is currently what we're working on with this year group, what is your focus, can we align the two? Some teachers are really good at meeting them but some possibly don't get the opportunity, the time, to go and meet with them. We have so many meetings about children, and IEPs, trying to set up more meetings is just overkill.*

4ii) How often do you communicate with the SPELD teacher? Through what means?

The majority of communication between classroom teachers and SPELD teachers is through email. The school participants also noted that they will chat with the SPELD teacher if they happen to meet at the school, or before or after the SPELD teacher takes a student out for tutoring. Two of the school teachers mentioned that if a formal meeting is required that will be arranged:

*If we need to discuss anything she'll email and if it needs to be verbally we'll set up a time.*

*She emails and sometimes she writes me a little note. She always pops in when she comes to get the children.*

4iii) Do you collaborate in regards to student x's learning goals and how they will be achieved?

Being able to meet at the beginning of the year when students are goal-setting was

noted by some of the classroom teachers as the optimum time for establishing collaboration between the school teacher and SPELD teacher regarding the student's learning goals:

*I would prefer they [SPELD teacher] came in and were part of our goal setting structure which we do at the beginning of the year when the teachers are getting to know their students but often we can't get that co-ordination happening and that puts extra pressure on the teacher to find yet another time that's going to work.*

One classroom teacher discussed how having the SPELD teacher in the classroom working with the student was an ideal situation:

*For me the best approach, it's only happened a couple of times, is when the SPELD teacher supports the programme in the classroom. So if we're doing a mini-inquiry project it would be ideal if I could have her in the room with me and working with that child to help me put together the literacy side of things of that task. She did actually do that once and it was really helpful. It took a bit of pressure off my time.*

However as noted by another teacher in this school, having the SPELD teacher working in the classroom raises a number of issues:

*But it really does compromise the school if they're not employed. How do you overcome that? Because schools nowadays, you've got to go through police vetting, everyone's got to be a registered teacher, there are so many compliance issues and when's it going to stop when you have someone swanning in? The ideal is that we can provide that but we do recognise that sometimes it's over-and-above what we can do so we walk that fine line all the time.*

#### 4iv) Do you share resources?

The sharing of resources between the schools and SPELD teachers, and vice versa, was noted by the school participants as a rare occurrence. One classroom teacher considered the school does share resources with the SPELD teacher by allowing them

space within their school to tutor from. Though physical resources are not shared, two of the classroom teachers mentioned that the SPELD teacher had shared recommendations of useful programmes and resources with them:

*She [SPELD teacher] has shown me some recommendations of workbooks that we could use in the spelling programme and the child also has a laptop. We are trying at the moment to put the Lexia programme on it so she [student] can work on it in class.*

4v) Do you implement advice/strategies the SPELD teacher has provided with the whole class?

The responses between classroom teachers varied greatly. One teacher discussed how following a staff meeting which the SPELD teacher spoke at, strategies such as picture-oriented activities versus word-oriented activities had attempted to be put in place school-wide for certain students. Another classroom teacher considered the strategies provided by the SPELD teacher was more specific to one child than class-wide. Two classroom teachers within one school stated that the SPELD teacher had not ever shared advice or strategies with them.

One school participant noted that taking on board advice or suggestions offered by SPELD teachers was something they as a school were trying to get better at.

Nevertheless, this classroom teacher discussed concerns still remained when working with the SPELD teachers:

*With all agencies you really want better communication and I think they are quite a separate identity at the moment. We do get the SPELD report which we do use. I don't think we meet as well as we probably could. We are starting to get the invites and getting them involved in the IEP process and in those processes but there's always concerns there, for us, working with someone who might have a slightly different agenda to us, and a slightly different viewpoint about where this child needs to go. Because we need to be really careful because we've both got the same set of clients and I guess we're trying to sell what we believe in and they could have different beliefs.*

5) What difficulties/barriers are impacting on you and the SPELD teacher working together?

The practicality of simply finding space for the SPELD teachers to work in was noted by all the school participants as a barrier:

*That's a big issue for all schools. I doubt you'd find a school that just has an office sitting free and that's a problem.*

Another barrier impacting on the relationship between schools and SPELD was the issue of timetabling and taking the student out during school hours to receive private tutoring:

*The biggest thing for us is if a child is going to go to SPELD tutor as required by a lot of parents the issue for us is timetabling. It's pressure from the parent and pressure from timetabling for SPELD tutors and the times that they are available, they've only got these times available and therefore they can only work these times which is during the school day unfortunately for a lot of them. We don't want the children pulled out of school to go to a SPELD tutor because that then impacts on the work their missing and therefore to catch-up is really important. So we've got a SPELD tutor which we allow to use our school which is kind of nice of us considering we don't receive any funds or anything from it, it's their business. So as long as we have space available we allow them to use it because it's in the benefit of that child.*

One classroom teacher considered that pulling the children out of class for SPELD tutoring did cause a few issues with them missing work but the impact was minimal and the benefit of receiving private tutoring outweighed what work they may miss:

*In the morning we do news and fitness. Ok they miss their news for one day a week. They miss their fitness for one day a week. Not the end of the world. It's one-to-one and who wouldn't want one-to-one, especially if you've got difficulties. And of course it's not coming out of any school budget.*

Other barriers impacting on the working relationship between SPELD teacher and classroom teachers, as highlighted by two teachers in one school, was the lack of relevance between what the student was learning during SPELD tutoring and what they were learning in the classroom programme:

*It doesn't seem to be connected to what we're actually doing. I can't see any changes or benefits from her having been there for an hour a week. I don't think her writing has improved that much for the amount that she has been there.*

*Not from what she's been doing in there. We don't have that strong a link between what's actually happening in there and what's actually happening in the classroom right now.*

The biggest barrier to collaboration between schools and SPELD was summarised simply by one school participant as:

*We don't employ them, that's got to be it don't you think? That's it in a nutshell.*

5i) What do you know about the strategies SPELD uses? Do you agree with them?

Two of the classroom teachers working at the same school did not know much about the strategies SPELD uses:

*Not much to be quite honest. No that's not something that she's [SPELD teacher] really shared with us as to what she's exactly doing. So it basically comes from the decision that she decides what the child needs. It's all a bit vague really. We don't get direct answers is the bottom line from my point of view.*

One classroom teacher reported that the strategies that the SPELD tutor uses do not seem to add much benefit for the student given the small amount of time they receive tutoring each week:

*I'm not saying that it's true for all children. I think probably like a lot of things for*

*children that need support its got to be frequent and often and once a week for 40 minutes is not frequent and often.*

When asked if the SPELD teacher was to tutor 3-4 times a week for 20-30 minutes at a time what difference this could have for a student the school participant responded:

*Ideally that would be great for the child but then it becomes a timetabling thing, it becomes a funding thing, it becomes whose responsibility is this? Is it the parents responsibility, because it is the parents and SPELD's responsibility or is this the school's responsibility? We already pour a lot of support into these kids, for doing that sort of work. A lot of the SPELD stuff is already additional on-top. All of the children who are normally involved in SPELD have been identified, parents have been met, targets have been set. For the more severe children there are more regular meetings, they have got targets which we want them to obtain, they've got teacher aide involved with them in their programme to help that classroom teacher, to help that child and they have SPELD which is that additional outside agency from the parents coming in.*

One classroom teacher agreed with the strategies that SPELD uses and believed that:

*If what we teach in the general way doesn't reach them then SPELD or other interventions are the next step. So use them. It makes my life so much easier if I know they're getting that.*

5ij) Do you think SPELD teachers have a place in mainstream education?

The classroom teachers were unanimous in their responses that SPELD teachers could have a place in schools:

*I think so. They seem professional, know what their doing, know what their outcomes are going to be, they have their objectives as a teacher does and if it works for the child which it seems to be for my ones then it's a win-win situation for all.*

Other school participants mentioned that though SPELD, in theory, could have a place

within schools there were still issues around funding and consistency between classroom learning and SPELD tutoring that would first need to be rectified:

*I think there would need to be a much closer relationship between what goes on in the classroom and the child's actual learning programme, a bit more like a teacher support.*

5iii) What are your views of the cost associated with SPELD assessments and subsequent tutoring?

The majority of responses from the classroom teachers was that they were unaware of what parents were charged for SPELD services, though they knew it was costly:

*I don't know what they are. I know it's not cheap. As a parent if that's where you think you want your funding to go then I would support it all the way.*

One teacher noted that despite the cost for SPELD assessment having a SPELD report could provide valuable information for accessing support for that child:

*I know it's very expensive. We are pretty lucky in this environment in that the families who choose to get their children assessed they're not too short of funds and the children and families that we do know that have issues we apply through the RTLB and they fund that SPELD report which gives us the diagnosis of whatever it is. It can be a useful resource for us to get the ball rolling with government agencies and support, in can be very, very useful.*

6) What would support this relationship?

The key word to appear in nearly all the classroom teachers responses to this question was *transparency*, for the school to have a clear idea of what the SPELD organisation is about and the ways in which the SPELD tutor works. Other factors that were discussed which could support a SPELD/School relationship was time and greater communication:

*It comes down to communication really. Everything's about communication. If we can communicate better we operate better and finding the time to do it.*

*There is no book that comes back to us to show us what she's done. We see no written report, we see no recording of anything at all and I think that's a downfall in the whole system. Even reporting once a term with how things have gone or where to next. So if we want anything we have to initiate it.*

A number of classroom teachers raised the possibility of SPELD working alongside the Ministry of Education as a means to support a SPELD/School relationship. As noted in the last two quotes both classroom teachers discussed the difficulty they, and the school has working with SPELD, given it is a private organisation:

*A bit more transparency with what we're doing, what she's doing. Maybe there would be a few students who would benefit from whatever the programme is and if it was incorporated into the school system then that would be easier to work. It's not as transparent as it needs to be. It's almost like a totally different programme which we have no control over what actually happens.*

*I think also SPELD trying to get into a relationship with the Education Department. I think they should be working alongside the Education Department to see how they can best help because they are getting more involved with children inside school hours. But what's the difference between a person coming in for SPELD and for a child going out for piano lessons? There is no difference. So that's where we've got to be really careful when we have parents that come in and say I'm taking my child out for 20 minutes to go and play the drums. Cause you set up a precedent and that can be really difficult to pull that back.*

*I don't know quite how we overcome that thing of people operating a business within a business. Our Principal asked when does it stop [individuals coming into schools], she's the one with the big picture. Her belief is that well if we let this person in then who's to say someone who wants their child taught in French and then that teacher arrives. I mean schools are a business, we've got to keep it very tight but I don't know. It's a tricky one.*

6i) Do you think the teachers should support a SPELD/School teacher relationship?

The classroom teachers were unanimous in that they should support a relationship with the SPELD teacher, however this would rely on certain conditions being attached:

*I think they should as long as it's like we've said it's transparent and there's reporting and there's communication.*

*Yes I think they should. If we agree that there is a child who the teacher, the leadership team agrees that there is a really big learning concern what support we get in for that child is a good thing but I think you always have to marry up what is too much and what's not enough. You don't want teacher aide, RTLB, SPELD all involved because this child's head is going to flip over, it's going to be too much.*

One classroom teacher acknowledged the relationship between school and SPELD requires support from both parties but that if a school was supporting the relationship then the same expectations should apply to the SPELD tutor:

*I would twist it and actually rather see it the other way round that SPELD actually supports what's going on in the classroom and the school. I know it's got to be a two-way thing but if they're coming into the school to do this. If they're doing this outside during their own time then that's something totally separate but if they are coming in during school time then I think there should be a certain amount of responsibility to support the classroom learning programme rather than us trying to work in with them.*

6ii) What role could the school system play in developing relationships between the school and the SPELD organisation/teachers?

As noted by a few of the classroom teachers, more transparency on the schools part in regards to their expectations and guidelines, could help support a school/SPELD relationship. Another classroom teacher discussed having a place for the SPELD teacher in the school and their work being valued would support the relationship:

*Having a place to do your professional job is really important. Having a place to be and*

*having it valued as a professional.*

One school participant believed that though building relationships was important it did not detract from the fact that SPELD is a private organisation, earning a profit, and the difficulties with SPELD teachers working in schools still remains:

*It's just so difficult. I just keep going back to that funding thing which is so important. They're earning a profit from educating children. We're not earning profit but they're a business. It's just a really difficult situation. If they want to come into the school that's great but you can't expect to come in and use resources and things that are available to schools because these are the school hours, we only have these kids for certain hours. We don't want the blame to come from the SPELD tutor that this child's not learning because their classroom teacher's not doing this or vice versa. It comes back to relationships.*

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

This chapter examines the results of the interviews conducted with SPELD teachers and school teachers from the Wellington region, and the significance of the findings in relation to existing literature. The results are discussed under the two headings of barriers and enablers. The findings indicated that the relationship between the SPELD teachers and the schools who took part in the study reflected a complex mix of barriers and supports for working together.

### **Barriers**

The barriers restricting the relationship between SPELD and schools in this study are numerous. Certain barriers were unique to a specific school/SPELD teacher but there were also barriers that were consistent across both groups. These are discussed below.

#### **1. Schools and Private Agencies**

One factor appeared to have a strong influence on the relationship SPELD teachers and school teachers experienced. This factor, as stressed by the majority of school participants, was that SPELD is an independent, private organisation, and, despite modest earnings for teachers, it is, unlike schools, a profiting business. This difference has been shown to affect the development of relationships in terms of mutual understanding, respect, and trust (Majumdar, 2006). It may also affect the organisations' ability to be flexible and reliable which are important factors in professional relationships (Hinshaw & DeLeon, 1995).

#### **2. SPELD Tutoring During School Hours**

As SPELD is a private organisation with its teachers working independently from school, a concern was raised about having SPELD teachers tutoring during school hours. The school teachers considered that having students withdrawn during the school day could cause disruption to their in-class learning. Accommodating SPELD programmes during school hours may also restrict the relationship between SPELD and schools

when children are seen by schools to miss the continuity of regular programmes. Such issues can place extra pressure on what may already be a strained relationship between classroom teacher and SPELD teacher. The majority of school participants considered that running SPELD tutoring outside of school hours could alleviate this issue of timetable clashes and absence from programmes. This may be beneficial for the SPELD/school relationship as more time could be dedicated to issues which are considered of greater important, issues such as ensuring consistency in a student's learning programme as opposed to time spent determining when a student could be withdrawn from class to attend SPELD tutoring. What may be restricting schools from a blanket policy of no external services during schools hours is that parents have a legal right to withdraw children during schools hours for private tutoring as stated in the Education Law Reform Act (1989). As two school participants discussed, where they draw the line for allowing private services in during their 'operating hours' can be difficult to determine.

### 3. SPELD Tutors and Existing School Specialists

In addition to concerns raised by the school teachers with regard to SPELD teachers tutoring during school hours and the impact on the collaborative relationship, there was also some resistance noted by the school teachers towards SPELD services when they considered the students needs can, and should, be met by the school. For some schools the services available to them, such as Reading Recovery and RT:Lit, were considered sufficient in meeting their students' needs. If a student is also to receive SPELD services this could be considered additional to the assistance that this student is already receiving. With SPELD teachers working during school hour's problems can, and do, arise with existing services and specialists already working in schools.

### 4. Turf Issues

The majority of SPELD participants reported examples of resistance from school teachers, from an individual staff member or the school as a whole, to their presence in schools. Resistance on the part of classroom teachers towards SPELD teachers may

be directly attributable to what Daka-Mulwanda et al. (1995) define as “turf” issues – when collaborators are reluctant to relinquish what they consider to be their territory. The resistance from the classroom teachers is examined as it is the SPELD teachers coming onto their 'territory' when tutoring in school hours. Turf issues may arise due to the history of SPELD, when an individual teacher had negative dealings with a SPELD teacher and such interactions were repeated to others for years to come. When classroom teachers have difficulties in dealing with even one specific SPELD teacher this can influence the teachers, and schools perception of the SPELD organisation as a whole. Such incidences can cloud current and future relationships between the two organisations. As Majumdar (2006) stated when historical tensions or ideological differences exist this can result in adversarial relationships that preclude collaboration. The resistance of some school teachers towards SPELD teachers working in their schools may also be compounded by the factors discussed below.

#### 5. Lack of Knowledge about SPELD

*a) Lack of Information.* School participants reported a lack of information about the SPELD organisation, the ways in which SPELD teachers operated, and the strategies SPELD teachers use during tutoring. The 2009/2010 NZCER evaluation of the SPELD organisation reported similar findings which considered that perhaps the most important message to come from the education sector was the general lack of knowledge about SPELD by New Zealand teachers (Brooking & Rowlands, 2009; Brooking & Hodgen, 2010). McCartney (1999) notes that lack of understanding about each other's working context is a factor which can restrict collaborative relationships.

*b) Lack of Evidence for Effectiveness.* In addition to lack of information about SPELD, some school participants believed there was a lack of evidence regarding the effectiveness of SPELD tutoring, although this was primarily based on personal observations of students that had been receiving SPELD services. The 2009/2010 NZCER survey of SPELD also reported that the education sectors lacked conviction

regarding the effectiveness of SPELD tutoring with over half of the school respondents not convinced that SPELD was more effective than other literacy interventions (Brooking & Rowlands, 2009; Brooking & Hodgen, 2010).

## 6. Practical Issues

*a) Lack of Regular Communication.* The SPELD teachers and school participants who contributed to this study acknowledged the importance of regular communication with one another but considered that the demands of their professions restricted the time they could dedicate to frequent, open communication. Lack of open communication is a factor which can restrict collaborative partnerships (Dunkle, 1993, 1994; Gray, 1995; Kusserow, 1991; Sarason et al., 1977 cited in Galvin, 1998). The way relationships and communication between an individual SPELD teacher and the schools in which they tutor is established appears to be largely achieved on an ad hoc basis. This can be helpful for both parties as issues can be discussed as the need arises. However, if guidelines and frameworks are not set up at the outset of the relationship then difficulties may arise between SPELD teacher and classroom teacher given lack of clarity about how the other is operating.

*b) Lack of space.* Finding space within the school in which the SPELD teacher can tutor was a difficulty facing the majority of schools in this study. This problem is further compounded if the school questions if they should be accommodating SPELD teachers to work in their school at all, an issue which was raised by the majority of school participants. When a SPELD teacher assumes accommodations should be made for them in the school, as was reported in a number of instances by school participants, this creates another barrier to the collaborative relationship where individuals have differing ideas about the underlying nature of the collaborative relationship (McCartney, 1999).

### 7. Lack of Consistency between SPELD work and Classroom work

The ability for the school teacher and the SPELD teacher to reach an agreement regarding a student's learning goals and collaboratively work towards these goals with the student is considered a positive facet of the SPELD/School relationship. As considered by Majumdar (2006) the ability to be complementary in terms of resources and skills is one element leading to effective partnerships. However, this may be difficult to achieve when there is disagreement between classroom teacher and SPELD teacher as to what those immediate goals should be. Half of the school participants reported that there was an apparent lack of consistency between curriculum work undertaken during class and work completed during SPELD tutoring. As one classroom teacher commented, if the SPELD teacher is coming into the school during school hours then there should be a certain amount of responsibility for them to support the classroom learning programme. When merging of expertise and division of labour (Hinshaw & DeLeon, 1995) does not occur between parties it can create a barrier which negatively impacts on attempts to develop the collaborative relationship.

#### **Enablers**

While there are multiple barriers restricting the relationship there are positive facets between the two organisations which are discussed below.

#### 1. Agreement of Overarching Goal

The participants from both institutions acknowledged that they are all working towards the same goal which ultimately was to assist in meeting the needs of all their students. The ability for individuals to envisage the collaborative aim/s of a partnership was considered by Hinshaw and DeLeon (1995) to be one factor that contributed to a successful collaborative relationship. Both SPELD teachers and the teachers in the schools sought the same outcomes of achievement for their students. This shared focus and purpose appeared to be a factor that superseded the barriers facing SPELD and schools in working together.

## 2. Willingness to Work Together

All participants believed that they should support a relationship between one another. As Majumdar (2006) stated a major barrier to collaboration is the absence of genuine willingness on the part of persons in agencies to work closely with one another. Therefore, the desire for individuals from the SPELD organisation and schools that signify a willingness to want to work with one another can assist the collaborative relationship. However, whether these sentiments are genuine or not may be difficult to ascertain.

## 3. Attempts to Establish the Parameters of the Working Relationship

The ability for parties to jointly develop and agree to a set of common goals and direction is one element supporting a collaborative relationship (Bruner, 1991 cited in Daka-Mulwanda et al., 1995). Attempts to establish how the relationship would function between SPELD teacher and classroom teacher in this study appeared to be achieved largely on an ad hoc basis, though there were instances in which SPELD and school teacher sought to establish goals and structures at the outset. When initial meetings were conducted it allowed an opportunity for both parties to clarify and align goals, and what role each would play in achieving this. Though there were difficulties reported by some SPELD teachers and school teachers in achieving shared goals, the fact that attempts were made to establish guidelines helps to support a collaborative relationship between the two parties.

## **Recommendations to Improve Collaboration**

In light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to improve relationships between SPELD teachers and classroom teachers.

### 1. Greater Transparency

For classroom teachers one of the biggest barriers they had in their dealings with SPELD teachers was a lack of information about the SPELD organisation. If collaboration is to be improved between these two groups the school respondents felt that greater

transparency on the part of both agencies could make a substantial impact in achieving this. McCartney (1999) considered a lack of understanding about each other's working context was a factor that could restrict the relationship between agencies. If SPELD increased promotion of their organisation and the services they offer would lend themselves to possibly greater collaboration with schools. SPELD participants agreed with the school participants that greater promotion of the SPELD organisation would improve relationships with schools. While more might be done on a national level, some SPELD teachers considered that the responsibility for developing relationships lay with individual SPELD teachers.

Increasing transparency is a two-way process. Schools also have a responsibility to communicate about the structures, processes, and policies by which each institution abides, in addition to information about the individual needs of the specific classroom teacher with which the SPELD teacher will be working with.

## 2. Establishing a Context

The relationship between SPELD teachers and classroom teachers appeared to largely be achieved on an ad hoc basis. While attempts may be made by both parties to establish guidelines and maintain regular communication this does not appear to be happening in the majority of cases. McCartney (1999) maintained that clarifying the assumptions and practices of each profession at the outset may assist in fostering a collaborative relationship between one another. Furthermore the Education Review Office (2008) conducted an evaluation examining schools engagement with parents, whanau, and communities and reported that “knowing what the barriers are for parents and for schools and working collaboratively to address and overcome these can lead to more positive engagement” (p.48). These findings are transferable to the SPELD/School relationship and highlight the importance of establishing a protocol for working together and how barriers will be identified and addressed. If each organisation were to increase transparency in the way they function it may assist with this process.

### 3. Building Collegiality

One factor stressed by all the SPELD participants as impacting negatively on the relationship between themselves and schools (albeit not specifically the schools in this study) were the negative attitudes and resistance displayed towards them, from an individual school staff member or the school as a whole. With an increasing number of SPELD teachers tutoring during school hours this may only be further heightening the situation. Willingness to share one's expertise (Hinshaw & DeLeon, 1995), mutually respectful relationships, and an understanding that building successful partnerships takes time and commitment (Bull et al., 2008) are all factors that could enhance collaboration between SPELD and schools. Improving collegiality between these two organisations will require greater transparency in how they function and establishing a protocol for how they will work with one another. At a more fundamental level, strengthening the interpersonal skills of individual SPELD teachers and school teachers such as effective communication, flexibility, and willingness to support one another, could be the pivotal factors in building collegiality between the two organisations. However, one difficulty in achieving collegiality is when school personnel and/or SPELD teachers do not believe the situation requires a partnership to be developed between one another.

#### **Is Collaboration Desirable in this Situation?**

The focus of this study has been to examine the barriers and enablers in the relationship between SPELD and schools and how collaboration can be enhanced. However, the question needs to be asked whether collaboration is achievable or even desirable in this situation. Majumdar's (2006) review of collaboration among government agencies highlights in two New Zealand Government reports that collaboration is time and resource intensive and that decisions are needed about when collaboration is required. In other words, collaboration is not appropriate for all situations. As many of the school participants referred to during the interview process SPELD is a private organisation and as long as they continue to operate in this capacity difficulties will remain for some schools in how, and if, they should be accommodating

SPELD teachers. Given that SPELD teachers are generally not employed by the school this also raises legal issues and what protocols SPELD teachers are required to adhere to such as police vetting. In light of the findings from this study it appears that the relationship between individual schools and SPELD teaches is established on a case by case basis. It may be that collaboration needs to occur on a national level between the SPELD organisation and the Ministry of Education to clarify the policies and systems for how a relationship between the two services will operate, and continue to operate, in the future. On the other hand, given the difficulties a number of schools are facing in accommodating SPELD teachers during their operating hours consideration may be required if SPELD would not be better to continue operating outside school hours as it was when the organisation was established. Who determines what the future arrangement between SPELD and schools will be is a challenging question and one which will require far greater clarification between the two organisations at both a local and national level.

### **Limitations**

A number of limitations of this research need to be mentioned. Firstly, the sample size of this study is relatively small and all the participants are located in one geographic location. These factors limit the generalisability of the findings. Secondly, this study followed a qualitative research design and subsequently the participant interviews are interpreted by the researcher. The researcher's interpretations cannot be separated from the researcher's background, history, contexts, and prior understandings (Creswell, 2009). Thirdly, the school participants involved in this study were self-selected, nominating themselves in response to a request from the researcher. Therefore, the factors which were identified as impacting on the relationship between SPELD and school in this study may not be representative of all school teacher and SPELD teacher relationships. Furthermore, those schools that had little or no involvement with SPELD teachers or the SPELD organisation were not represented in this study.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

In light of the limitations of this study the following recommendations are made for future research. Extending the sample size to include a greater number of both SPELD and school participants, and from a wider range of geographical locations within New Zealand, would allow for a greater number and range of issues in the SPELD/School relationship to be discussed and addressed. Secondly, though the focus of this study was examining the two-way relationship between SPELD and schools it may be useful to include parents of children and even children who are receiving SPELD services to increase understanding of the four-way relationship between SPELD, schools, students and parents. Including parents in future research will also allow for triangulation of data which would increase internal validity of the research.

## **Conclusions**

The findings of this study sought to increase understanding of the relationship between SPELD and schools in New Zealand. Three research questions were established to assist in this process and are listed below:

1. What supports SPELD and schools to work together?
2. What factors restrict the relationship between SPELD and schools?
3. How can collaboration between SPELD and schools be enhanced?

The major findings of this study are summarised below in response to these three research questions.

### **1. What Supports SPELD and Schools to Work Together?**

Perhaps the greatest enabler in the relationship between SPELD and schools was both groups acknowledgement that ultimately they all want to achieve the same outcome, which is to support their students. All the participants believed that they should be supporting a relationship between one another. Other factors supporting the relationship between SPELD teacher and school teacher, as noted in some cases, were attempts to establish guidelines and attempts at communication. Though the work demands of both professions often dictated the amount of time that could be spent in

establishing guidelines and commitment to ongoing communication between one another, the desire for both groups to improve on these aspects signifies a willingness to improve the collaborative relationship.

### 2. What Factors Restrict the Relationship Between SPELD and Schools?

The core underlying difficulty for schools in working with SPELD, as identified in this study, is that SPELD operates as a private organisation independent from the mainstream education system. In addition to issues surrounding public versus private sector, difficulties also arise for schools with SPELD teachers tutoring during school hours and the possibility of conflict with existing specialists. From interviews conducted with both classroom teachers and SPELD teachers this appears a central barrier in the relationship between the two organisations. Further barriers impeding on the relationship include practical issues such as finding the space in schools for SPELD teachers to tutor, schools lack of information about the SPELD organisation, and 'turf issues'.

### 3. How Can Collaboration Between SPELD and Schools be Enhanced?

Firstly, greater transparency on the part of both agencies, particularly in how they operate, could assist in enhancing the SPELD/School relationship. As noted by the majority of school and SPELD participants if the SPELD organisation were to increase awareness and promote their services it would possibly increase understanding about the organisation, particularly for those in mainstream education services. Secondly, while the majority of relationships in this study appeared to operate on an ad hoc basis for the SPELD teacher and school teacher to clarify issues and establish guidelines at the outset could improve collaboration between one another. And thirdly, building collegiality between school staff and SPELD teachers could enhance mutually respectful relationships which subsequently may lead to greater collaboration. For the SPELD teachers in this study, greater acceptance of the value and expertise they have to offer would assist the relationship building process.

### **Concluding Statement**

To best meet the needs of all students in the education sector often requires collaboration between numerous individuals, groups, and organisations. For students with specific learning disabilities the SPELD organisation may be one avenue parents seek to support their child's needs in addition to services provided by the schooling sector. As SPELD moves from teaching in their homes to within school hours, questions have arisen about the most effective means for these two institutions, SPELD and schools, to work together to best meet the needs of students with specific learning difficulties.

This study sought to understand the relationship between SPELD teachers and classroom teachers. Analysis of the findings revealed that the relationship between SPELD teachers and schools who took part in the study was characterised by a complex mix of barriers and supports for working together. Over-riding what barriers there may be in the relationship between SPELD teachers and schools was the acknowledgement that both parties were working towards a shared goal; to assist in meeting the needs of students. To ensure both organisations are able to continue working towards this goal, compromise may be required, at both a local and national level, to determine how best a collaborative relationship could function to maximise the impact of learning for the individual concerned.

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## Appendix A: Information Sheet



School of Education  
Educational Psychology Training Programme  
Auckland Campus  
Private Bag 102 904  
North Shore Mail Centre

July 2010

### The Relationship between SPELD and Schools in New Zealand

#### Information Sheet

Researcher: Jenny Devine

Supervisors: Dr. Jean Annan and Jayne Jackson

*This research is being carried out by Jenny Devine to fulfil the requirements of a Masters degree in Educational Psychology at Massey University, Auckland.*

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#### **Research Description**

This thesis will examine the relationship between SPELD and selected schools in New Zealand from the Wellington region. The research aims to determine the nature of the relationships of those groups involved with SPELD and to understand what enables a relationship between agencies and schools.

#### **Research Procedures**

The research involves interviews conducted individually with each of the participants. The interviews will take between 30 - 60 minutes. Participants will comprise 6 SPELD teachers and 6 classroom teachers of students who are currently receiving SPELD tutoring. Participants may also include other school staff members.

#### **Confidentiality**

All information obtained in this research will be treated in confidence. The interview will be audio taped and immediately erased after it has been transcribed. To ensure confidentiality pseudonyms will be used instead of real names. Access to any data during the study will be restricted to the researcher, Jenny Devine and the supervisors, Dr. Jean Annan and Jayne Jackson.

#### **Distribution of Findings**

The research will be submitted for examination and lodged as a thesis at Massey University, Auckland. A summary report on the findings of the research will be sent to all the research participants. The complete report will be available to all participants on completion of the project.

### **Participant's Rights**

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time until the beginning of the analysis of the data;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Note: Participants are asked to complete the consent form that accompanies this information sheet.

### **Further Information**

If you require further information about this research, please contact either:

*Researcher:*

Jenny Devine

Telephone: 04 977 7442

Mobile: 027 3277 385

Email: [j\\_m\\_devine@hotmail.com](mailto:j_m_devine@hotmail.com)

Or

*Supervisors:*

Dr. Jean Annan

Telephone: 09 414 0800 ext.9814

Email: [j.annan@massey.ac.nz](mailto:j.annan@massey.ac.nz)

Jayne Jackson

Telephone: 09 414 0800 ext.9709

Email: [j.h.jackson@massey.ac.nz](mailto:j.h.jackson@massey.ac.nz)

*"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.*

*If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 350 5249, email [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz)".*

## Appendix B: Consent Form



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Educational Psychology Training Programme  
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North Shore Mail Centre

July 2010

### The Relationship between SPELD and Schools in New Zealand

#### Participant Consent Form

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I have read the attached Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study before information is analysed and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission. (*This information will be used only for this research and publications arising from the research project*).

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Full Name - printed**  
\_\_\_\_\_

Contact:

*Researcher:*

Jenny Devine

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**Appendix C: Transcript Release Form**



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July 2010

**The Relationship between SPELD and Schools in New Zealand**

Authority for the Release of Transcripts

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I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used in reports and publications arising from the research.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Full Name -  
printed** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: Interview Schedules

### Interview Schedules

**Aim of the study:** To understand the relationship between SPELD and selected schools in New Zealand.

**Research questions:**

1. What supports SPELD and schools to work together?
2. What factors restrict the relationship between SPELD and schools?
3. How can collaboration between SPELD and schools be enhanced?

**Classroom Teachers**

*Background information*

- How long have you been teaching?
- How long have you been teaching at this school?

*Relationships*

- What are your views about SPELD?
  - Do you consider the SPELD teacher to be an expert in the field of SLDs?
  - Would you go to the SPELD teacher for advice? Why or why not?
- Do you know the schools' position with regard to SPELD? If so, what is this?
- Do you consider to have a working relationship between the SPELD teacher and yourself?
- What can you say about the relationship with the SPELD teacher?
  - How do you establish the ways that you will work together?
  - How often do you communicate with the SPELD teacher? Through what means? (i.e., face-to-face; email)
  - Do you collaborate in regards to student x's learning goals and how they will be achieved?
  - Do you share resources?
  - Do you implement advice/strategies the SPELD teacher has provided with the whole class?
- What difficulties/barriers are impacting on you and the SPELD teacher working together?
  - What do you know about the strategies SPELD uses? Do you agree with them?
  - Do you think SPELD teachers have a place in mainstream education?
  - What are your views of the cost associated with SPELD assessments and subsequent tutoring?
- What would support this relationship?
  - Do you think the teachers should support a SPELD/School Teacher relationship?
  - What role could the school system play in developing relationships between

the school and the SPELD organisation/teachers?

### **SPELD Teachers**

#### *Background information*

- How long have you been a SPELD teacher?
- What other educational roles have you held?
- Why did you choose to train as a SPELD teacher?
- How many students are you currently tutoring?

#### *Relationships*

- How did student x get referred to you?
- Where do you tutor student x? (Home, school)
- Do you consider to have a working relationship between the classroom teacher and yourself?
- What can you say about the relationship with the classroom teacher?
  - How do you establish the ways that you will work together?
  - How often do you communicate with the classroom teacher? Through what means? (i.e., face-to-face; email)
  - Do you collaborate in regards to student x's learning goals and how they will be achieved?
  - Do you share resources?
- What difficulties/barriers are impacting on you and the classroom teacher working together?
  - What are your views about the strategies SPELD uses? Do you agree with them?
  - Do you think SPELD teachers have a place in mainstream education?
  - What are your views of the cost associated with SPELD assessments and subsequent tutoring?
- What would support this relationship?
  - Do you think the SPELD teachers should support a SPELD/school teacher relationship
  - What role could the SPELD organisation play in developing relationships between the school and the SPELD organisation/teachers?