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What Assistance is Needed?

Assessment for Literacy Learning Difficulties

in NZ Schools

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

At the present time, contemporary information regarding effective assessment and remediation practices for children with literacy learning difficulties in New Zealand/Aotearoa schools is scarce. The aim of the present study was to fill that gap in our understanding by carrying out a survey of current practices and comparing these with the research literature on best practice in assessment and remediation. To address the research questions, an online survey was developed and emailed to all schools in New Zealand/Aotearoa. There were 208 responses from a wide range of schools across the country and from a number of specialist teachers and school leaders. In addition to the online survey, interviews were carried out with 13 of the respondents, representing both teachers and specialist teachers. The results indicated a wide diversity of assessment and remediation practices in schools for students with literacy learning difficulties. A possible explanation for this is that assessment and remediation methods are often tied to theoretical views of the literacy process. At the current time in New Zealand/Aotearoa there are varied theoretical perspectives that seem to account for that diversity, in particular, the difference between whole language and phonological theories and their implications for assessment and remediation. The results from this study indicated that teachers and specialists were focusing mainly on proximal factors in assessment and were teaching to those factors. They paid less attention to the assessment of distal factors which is more of a focus among psychologists. This study provides the basis for further discussion into how best to identify and remediate students with literacy learning difficulties in New Zealand/Aotearoa.

Preface

This research study was designed with the needs of students/ākonga and their teachers/kaiako at the fore. So many of our children/tamariki in New Zealand/Aotearoa struggle with literacy learning and so many of our hard-working teachers struggle to understand their needs and how to best support them. I hope that this research will reach out to teachers across the country and assist them with reflecting on ways to enhance their practice, using some of the evidence-based methods discussed. Because no child deserves to be left behind.

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Approval for this research project has been obtained from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee to administer the survey and interviews described in this thesis (application reference NOR 16/47).

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