

Enhancing literacy learning outcomes for beginning readers: research results and teaching strategies

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A research project at Massey University, New Zealand aims to improve literacy outcomes in the early years of school by educating teachers in strategies on specific literacy learning needs.

The main purpose of the project was to improve the literacy learning outcomes of New Entrant/Year 1 children by providing teachers with supplementary teaching strategies focused on specific literacy learning needs. This project provided professional learning and development (PLD) workshops and associated materials for teachers of New Entrant/Year 1 children, and assessed the impact of the workshops on students' literacy learning outcomes during Year 2. The workshops provided teachers with the knowledge and skills to adopt explicit and systematic word decoding teaching strategies in their literacy instruction. Effective word decoding skills are a necessary requirement for learning to read.

The study reported here began with children who started school for the first time in February 2016. New Entrant teachers of these children participated in PLD workshops during 2016. These children and teachers formed the 'Intervention' group. In addition, we had children from schools that chose not to have their teachers participate in the PLD workshops. These children formed the 'Comparison' group. Literacy assessments were collected from school entry to the middle of Year 2 for children in both groups.

At the start of the project in 2016, assessment results showed that the Intervention and Comparison children were similar across a range of reading-related measures. By the middle of Year 2, the Intervention children significantly outperformed the Comparison children on assessments of reading and spelling. Especially significant was the finding that the low-SES Intervention group of children markedly outperformed the low-SES Comparison group of children, and in some measures they had mean literacy assessment scores that were close or equal to those of the group of children in higher-SES schools.

Assessments of the Intervention teachers showed important improvements in their knowledge of the language foundations associated with effective literacy teaching and learning. Video clips of classroom teaching also revealed changes in instructional practices that reflected the content and materials from the PLD workshops. The significant improvements in literacy learning outcomes of the Intervention children are consistent with the changes teachers made as a result of the PLD workshops.

The results of this project show that there is a large potential benefit for children and teachers throughout New Zealand in modifying significant aspects of literacy teaching in New Entrant/Year 1 classrooms. We provide specific suggestions to support such modifications.

Two research reports (one full technical report; one summary report, less technical) are [available online](#). The Executive Summary shown here is from the shorter, summary report.

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