

REPORT

Report of the Literacy Taskforce

Advice to the Government on achieving its goal that:

**“By 2005, every child turning nine will be able to read,
write, and do maths for success”**

A report prepared for the Minister of Education

March 1999



Executive Summary

The Literacy Taskforce endorsed the Government's goal that "By 2005, every child turning nine will be able to read, write, and do maths for success."

The taskforce agreed that the goal provides a focus for the whole community to support children's learning both in and out of school. Defining the goal through providing a rich description of the knowledge, understandings, skills, and attitudes that nine-year-olds should demonstrate when they are reading and writing for success will set clear national expectations that everyone – teachers, parents, and children – can understand and work towards.

The Literacy Taskforce believes that the goal can be achieved by ensuring that all children receive the best possible teaching in their first four years at school. This means that teachers must be well prepared for their challenging jobs through high-quality teacher education that includes a strong focus on developing the skills and knowledge necessary to implement best practice in the teaching of reading and writing. It means that teachers should be supported by strong professional leadership in their schools, through ongoing access to quality professional development opportunities, with appropriate classroom materials, and with the support of effective interventions when they identify children who need a period of intensive specialised teaching.

The Literacy Taskforce agreed that children's learning is enhanced by effective partnerships between school and home and that people and organisations in the community can support children's learning in a range of ways, many of which are simple yet effective.

The recommendations of the Literacy Taskforce are directed towards this end.

Background

The Government's Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

Although most New Zealand children do well at reading, writing, and mathematics, there is evidence that some do not. Of special concern are a wide gap between the highest and lowest levels of reading achievement and significant differences in performance in all areas between particular groups of children. With the objective of raising overall achievement, particularly in maths, and closing the gap between the lowest and highest achievers, particularly in reading, the Government has adopted the following goal:

"By 2005, every child turning nine will be able to read, write, and do maths for success."

Student achievement is influenced by personal, cultural, family, and school factors. Feelings of personal success and capability, as well as personal interests and liking for a subject, have a strong bearing on progress and learning outcomes. The expectations and support of people who matter in their lives and their opportunities and experiences both in and out of school are also important influences on children's achievement. Finally, the quality of the curriculum – its content, design, and the way in which it is taught and monitored – is also a significant influence on children's achievement.

Success in learning is most likely when effective teaching practices and an appropriate curriculum encourage and build on the learner's motivation and interest. Both learner interest and an appropriate curriculum are informed and complemented by good communication between home and school and by shared understandings and expectations of goals. Achieving ongoing improvements in outcomes for all students depends on the involvement of parents, communities, early childhood education services, and schools, in addition to support and leadership from the Government.

The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy includes:

- ensuring that the goal for nine-year-olds is well understood in the education sector and by parents and the wider community;
- working out the most effective way to measure the progress of individuals and groups towards the goal;
- supporting the best possible teaching of all children;
- ensuring that government interventions to support children's learning in literacy are as effective and efficient as possible;
- providing extra support for programmes through a special proposals pool;
- encouraging parents and the wider community to support children's learning at school and in early childhood through a public information campaign.

The Literacy Taskforce

As a key input into the development of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, the Government established the Literacy Taskforce to provide advice on how the goal should be defined, how progress towards it should be measured, and the ways in which literacy learning could best be supported. The taskforce was asked to make specific recommendations to improve teaching and learning for children in their first four years at school, to identify those aspects of current practice that need affirming or reinforcing, and to indicate programmes or practices that need reviewing.

Because the development of literacy is a fundamental role of schools, the Minister of Education wanted the taskforce to comprise mostly principals or teachers who are working successfully with those children considered most at risk of failure. Appendix A sets out a full list of the Literacy Taskforce members and their initial terms of reference.

A sub-group of the Maths and Science Taskforce was reconvened to provide advice on the mathematics part of the goal. Their advice is reported separately.

The Literacy Experts Group

The Secretary for Education convened a ten-member Literacy Experts Group to provide the Literacy Taskforce with advice from theoretical and academic perspectives. A list of the members of this group is included in Appendix A.

Process

The Literacy Taskforce met as a whole group for three working sessions over a three-month period. In between sessions, members discussed issues with their colleagues and sought and considered information relevant to the terms of reference from a wide range of sources. Their report is as follows.

Defining the Goal

The Literacy Taskforce agreed that defining the goal, that “By 2005, every child turning nine will be able to read, write, and do maths for success” provided an opportunity for everyone – schools, parents, the community, and the child – to share an understanding of what it means to read, write, and do maths for success.

The taskforce considered the tension between stating minimum standards that all children should be expected to reach and providing indicators of success that motivate students to “soar”. The Literacy Experts Group’s advice was that care needs to be taken not to set minimal competency levels. These have been abandoned by most states in the United States because they were found to have lowered standards. The taskforce is aware that the literacy strategy is about both raising achievement for all students, including the gifted and talented, and closing the gap between the lowest and highest achievers.

The taskforce was adamant that the expectations of the achievement of all children should be the same, regardless of the language of instruction or their ethnicity. However, it is clear that some children, for example, immigrant children who at nine years old might have had only one year’s instruction in English, will need more assistance than others. The taskforce also agreed that although the goal is relevant and appropriate to children in Māori-medium education, the procedures and approaches for achieving the goal may well be different from those in English-medium education.

For students with special education needs, the idea of learning to read and write for success is individual to them and should be expressed through their individual education plans.

The Literacy Taskforce was strongly of the view that defining a goal for reading and writing should not result in the production of an alternative national curriculum. The taskforce considers that it is the proper purpose of the national curriculum to set out the levels of expected achievement and that the literacy goal should reflect those objectives. The members agreed that most nine-year-olds will be achieving at level 2 in English in the New Zealand Curriculum, some will be achieving at level 3, and some will be working at between levels 1 and 2. Children in Māori-medium education will be working to the appropriate levels specified in Te Reo Māori i roto i Te Marautanga o Aotearoa.

In providing advice on defining the goal, the taskforce therefore prefers the development of a description of the knowledge, understandings, strategies, and attitudes that nine-year-olds should demonstrate when reading and writing for success. The taskforce considered that developing such a set of descriptors alongside some examples of text that children are reading and of children’s writing will serve to set national expectations for teachers and parents.

There are many general features of learning to read and write that apply across countries, but others are specific to New Zealand; for example, our cultural context includes recognition of the educational and language needs of both Māori and non-Māori deriving from obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi and such official policies as the recognition of both English and te reo Māori as official languages.

Reading and writing

Reading and writing are complex activities. The Literacy Experts Group's approach to providing advice on defining the goal was to use oral language as a basis.

"In general, successful reading for children at age nine means comprehending in print much of what they are expected to comprehend when listening to spoken language. Successful writing means expressing in print much of what they are expected to express when speaking.

These statements refer to the child's language of instruction, for example, they refer to the Māori language for children who are developing bilingually in the Māori medium.

The goal to read and write for success should provide an effective platform for the subsequent development of biliteracy."

—Literacy Experts Group's advice to the Literacy Taskforce

Successful reading and writing have several features that a child is able to demonstrate across multiple text types. The primary features are text comprehension (for reading) and text construction (for writing), with further features of accuracy, fluency, and the self-motivation to read and write.

The Literacy Taskforce agreed that the School Journals (Parts 1 and 2) provide the only existing national examples of reading material most likely to be used by teachers in their day-to-day teaching practice with nine-year-olds. There are no national indicators for children's writing.

The junior Māori readers used in Māori-medium education have been organised into levels of difficulty (Ngā Kete Kōrero framework). All remaining Māori readers have yet to be fitted into this framework. When this work is completed, it should provide national indicators for reading in Māori-medium education.

The Literacy Taskforce recommends that a description of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that nine-year-olds demonstrate when they are reading and writing for success, together with a description of the features of appropriate texts, be developed and promulgated to teachers and parents.¹ (A possible model of the descriptors is provided in Appendix B.)

¹ This proposal will need to be explored further for Māori-medium education.

The taskforce agreed that reading and writing for success at nine is essential for further progress both in and out of school. However, further progress is dependent on continuing effective education as well as on-going practice beyond formal schooling.

The Current Situation

What do we know about the progress children are currently making towards the goal?

The Literacy Taskforce acknowledged that currently we know only about the achievement of students learning in the medium of English. There has been no systematic collection and analysis of data of children's progress and achievement for learning in the medium of Māori (or any other language of instruction).

International and local studies confirm that, in general, New Zealand children are successful readers and writers compared with children from countries with similar or better socio-economic conditions. However, the same studies highlight a wide variation in performance in reading tasks of particular groups of New Zealand students.²

The IEA international survey of reading of nine-year-olds (1990) showed that Māori performed significantly below the international average, and Māori boys performed at a level below that of Māori girls. A further analysis of the data shows significant differences in word recognition and comprehension between children whose home language was English compared to children whose home language was not. Many of these were Pacific Islands children.

The evidence suggests initial disparities that then continue to grow over the first four years of schooling between Māori and Pacific Islands children on the one hand and Pākehā children on the other, as well as disparities between children in low-decile schools and those in other schools. It was noted that there is a high proportion of Māori and Pacific Islands children in low-decile schools.³

Analyses of school leaver qualifications data and the International Adult Literacy Survey show lower levels of performance for Māori and Pacific Islands people than for Pākehā, which suggests that later learning has not redressed these problems. This clearly has further implications for generational effects on children's literacy learning.

Reading Recovery identifies, through its diagnostic survey, about 20 percent of children who, compared with the other children in their classroom, are making relatively limited

² These studies were the IEA Reading Literacy Study, 1990; the International Adult Literacy Study, 1997; the NEMP Report 6 Reading and Speaking Assessment, 1996. Initial disparities are reported in School Entry Assessment/Aro matawai Urunga-a-Kura, The First National Picture - July 1997 - May 1998.

³ Initial disparities are reported in School Entry Assessment/Aro matawai Urunga-à-Kura: The First National Picture - July 1997-May 1998.

progress after one year of instruction. However, the performance of that 20 percent in any one classroom could be above, at, or below the national average. The taskforce noted that it appears that this convention of identifying children using the diagnostic survey has led to the widely expressed claim that 20 percent of children are failing in their literacy learning in New Zealand schools.

A third small group⁴ of “hard to teach” students is identified by such interventions as Reading Recovery and the Resource Teachers of Reading service.

A summary of the studies referred to above is attached in Appendix C.

Implications

The studies suggest that our literacy strategies are more effective for most students than those in many other similar countries. However, the evidence also suggests that our teaching is far less effective for the underachieving groups described in the previous section. The taskforce agreed that there is also sufficient evidence to show that boys are not doing as well as girls in our school system. The taskforce agreed that the challenge is to ensure that our teaching practices are equally effective for all children.

In many classrooms, children who might be expected to make limited progress because they fit the profile of the underachieving groups in fact make excellent progress. But the taskforce was concerned that not enough is known about the particular teaching strategies and approaches in New Zealand that bring about these results, and it recommends that more research be undertaken so that better guidance can be given to teachers.

Effective Teaching

The taskforce agreed that, in general, with adequate support systems in place, the following factors contribute towards success for all children:

- the highest quality teaching is available to all children, regardless of the medium of instruction;
- there is a culture of high expectations for all children;
- the whole school is a community of learners;
- there is a close partnership between home and school;
- the cultural identity of children is recognised and affirmed.

Best practice for teaching reading and writing

In New Zealand, decisions about how to teach are made at the school level – that is, teaching methods are not prescribed as part of the national curriculum, although official

⁴ This group represents around 1-2% of six-to-seven-year-olds.

guidance is provided through the teacher materials outlined later in this report. The Literacy Taskforce believes that this policy should not be changed. Decisions about teaching strategies, teaching approaches, and materials to use are professional decisions that are best made at the local school level in response to the needs of particular groups of children and individuals. However, the taskforce was concerned that, given the evident under-achievement of some children, “more of the same” will not be good enough.

The Literacy Taskforce endorsed the following principles of best practice in whichever medium of instruction:

- a sound understanding of the learning process that underpins all teaching;
- the expectation that all children will become successful readers and writers;
- language programmes that acknowledge the interrelationship and reciprocity of oral, written, and visual language;
- planning for teaching that will build on the child’s existing skills, knowledge, interests, and individual needs and that will acknowledge the role of the child as an active learner;
- teaching that takes account of children’s linguistic and cultural backgrounds;
- teaching that uses a range of explicit and implicit instructional strategies appropriate to the learner, including small-group or individual instruction where appropriate;
- regular and purposeful monitoring – children’s progress in reading and writing being monitored regularly (using running records, teacher conferencing, observation, and other methods) for clear purpose and for use in subsequent teaching;
- the development of positive attitudes to reading and writing, including the willingness to take risks;
- the use of a wide range of interesting material, fiction and non-fiction, in a range of media and appropriate to the instructional levels, including repetitive texts, rhymes, poems, and songs, to enhance children’s print and phonological awareness;
- access to a wide range of interesting and stimulating material, fiction and non-fiction, in a range of media;
- teachers who are readers and writers.

The taskforce also considered that a statement of best practice needs to be quite specific about what comprises appropriate instructional approaches, particularly in the light of the public debate about phonics and whole language. Although the debate has brought important issues about the teaching of reading to the surface, the taskforce felt that it had been conducted by the media in a way that polarised views. The taskforce

strongly believes that such polarisation has been unhelpful⁵ when the focus of attention should be on ensuring that instructional approaches include an appropriate mix of strategies.

The Literacy Experts Group's advice on appropriate instructional approaches was based on a concern they expressed that teachers may not always select appropriate strategies, particularly when working with struggling readers. There is sound research that indicates that children should not rely on context as the primary or only strategy for working out unknown words but should develop the use of word-level skills and strategies. For some struggling readers, teachers may need to place a stronger emphasis on the development of word-level skills and strategies than for those children who quickly develop alphabetic awareness and are able to use language prediction skills such as context much more readily.

The taskforce agreed that it is essential that all teachers be skilled and able to use a wide range of strategies with children, selecting those that are most appropriate at the time rather than trying to provide a balance or following a particular approach.

The Literacy Taskforce recommends that a statement of best practice be drawn up and promulgated to schools. This statement should also guide the development of curriculum materials for both teachers and children developed and distributed by the Ministry of Education and guide schools' purchase of materials.

The national curriculum

The national curriculum for reading and writing in general classrooms is outlined in English in the New Zealand Curriculum and in Te Reo Māori i roto i Te Marautanga o Aotearoa for Māori-medium education.⁶ The Literacy Taskforce believes that although the curriculum objectives in the English curriculum are deliberately broad and therefore often need further elaboration to be successfully implemented, they do not need to be changed.⁷ The taskforce supported the Ministry of Education's proposals to develop exemplars to give further guidance.

⁵ The taskforce was concerned that some schools' response to the phonics/whole language debate has been to move towards using reading programmes that place a heavy emphasis in teaching subskills in isolation – that is, the "skill and drill" approach, whereas others seem to have moved towards an exclusively whole-language approach with no systematic teaching of phonological awareness.

⁶ The national curriculum statements are available on-line at <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/curriculum>

⁷ The taskforce was informed by the Ministry of Education that the national curriculum would be fully evaluated over the next year or two once the current cycle of development had been completed.

Members of the taskforce thought that the curriculum for Māori-medium education, Te Reo Māori i roto i Te Marautanga o Aotearoa, might need further consideration in the light of experience being gained through its implementation.

The taskforce was concerned at the way in which a balanced curriculum has been interpreted by many schools to mean that equal time should be given to each of the essential learning areas. It considered that schools should be given clearer direction to emphasise literacy and numeracy in the early years. However, this emphasis does not necessarily mean allocating more time to language programmes than is currently usually given in the junior school but using that time more effectively and actively reinforcing the development of literacy and numeracy through the rest of the curriculum.

Such an emphasis could be issued through modifying the National Administration Guidelines (NAGs).

The taskforce was concerned that the way in which the NAGs' requirements to "monitor student progress against the national achievement objectives" and to "assess student achievement, maintain individual records, and report on student progress" have been interpreted and implemented are not reasonable. The taskforce was aware of teachers being required to gather large amounts of detailed data to record the progress of individual children across the curriculum at the expense of quality instruction time. It is difficult for teachers to maintain an emphasis on literacy and numeracy in these circumstances. The taskforce believes that all the essential learning areas are important, particularly for those children in the target groups because of the rich experiences they provide, for example, in art and physical education, but that the workload associated with monitoring in this way often intrudes on quality teaching and learning time.

The Literacy Taskforce recommends that the requirement on schools to provide the broad curriculum, as laid out in the New Zealand Curriculum Framework, should continue but that the monitoring requirements of the National Administration Guidelines be modified for the early years to focus on student achievement in literacy and numeracy.

Curriculum materials for teachers and children

The Ministry of Education provides schools with both teacher materials, and materials for children to support literacy learning. Most of these materials, such as *The Learner as a Reader* and *Dancing with the Pen*, which are guidelines for teachers, and the *Ready to Read* series and the *School Journals* are published for the Ministry by Learning Media Limited. *Ngā Kete Kōrero*, a levelled reading series for children in Māori-medium classrooms, is published by Learning Media Limited and Huia Publishers. The Literacy Taskforce believes that although schools buy materials from other providers, materials provided by the Ministry are essential to ensure that all schools are provided with best practice guidelines and models.⁸

⁸ A list of current materials provided to schools can be found in the Ministry of Education 1998-99 Catalogue: Learning Materials for New Zealand Schools, which is also available on-line at <http://www.learningmedia.co.nz>

The taskforce agreed that teachers need more assistance than is currently available through the materials provided. This does not mean step-by-step instructions for teachers to follow but more detail to help them to select and use appropriate instructional approaches and strategies, particularly those to be used with children who are in underachieving groups.

The taskforce would also like to see more material for limited-progress children as well as a greater awareness being given to ensuring that the Ready to Read series includes texts that provide more support for struggling learners.

The Literacy Taskforce recommends that priority be given to:

- developing a video that illustrates taking and analysing running records in English and in Māori and using this data to inform the teaching programme;⁹
- revising Reading in Junior Classes;
- developing teacher guidelines for teaching reading and writing in Māori-medium education;
- ensuring that the series for children include adequate suitable material for struggling readers;
- positioning te reo Māori readers to fit Ngā Kete Kōrero framework levels (levels 1 to 3);
- developing guidelines for schools to use when selecting materials for their literacy programmes.

The Literacy Taskforce strongly supported the development of a professional development package. This package is discussed later in this report.

Teacher education

Members of the Literacy Taskforce expressed concern about the widely reported variability in the skills and knowledge about literacy learning that they and their colleagues have noticed in graduates from current teacher education providers. For example, some members reported instances of teachers who have begun their teaching careers this year not yet able to undertake such fundamental procedures as running records or with little apparent knowledge of the procedures for guided reading. Even taking into account that two years of support and guidance will be provided by schools before they are registered, some beginning teachers do not appear to meet the relevant interim standards developed for the Performance Management System.

The taskforce was concerned that it was difficult to find out about current teacher education programmes and how they prove their suitability for teacher registration purposes. Not enough appears to be known in an area of critical importance to the quality of teaching and thus to the achievement of children.

The Literacy Taskforce recommends that the Government investigate how and why teacher education programmes, particularly in respect to literacy learning, are approved for the purposes of teacher registration.

⁹ The proposed video could be part of the self-directed professional development package that is also recommended.

Professional development

Throughout its discussions, the Literacy Taskforce kept reiterating the importance of professional development for teachers. The taskforce was concerned that not all teachers have the same high level of skills and knowledge in respect to literacy learning as that which is demonstrated by leading teachers. Such demonstration of best practice is particularly evident when leading teachers are working with children most at risk of underachievement. The taskforce believes that it is essential that all teachers be engaged in regular, quality professional development and that improving teacher capability in literacy learning is seen as a priority in the professional development plans in primary schools. The taskforce acknowledged that this priority creates a tension in schools having to address the implementation of new curriculum statements.

The taskforce was also very concerned that the Government's intended policy of devolving the funding currently used for the Teacher Support Service to schools could result in teachers not having access to quality advice and support. Members considered that this is a serious equity issue affecting rural and lower decile schools in particular.

The taskforce recalled the effectiveness of ERIC, the in-service training programme that was once available to teachers.¹⁰ Members would like to see the development of a new professional development package for the Māori as well as the English medium. The package should use such media as videos and printed material, which could be available for teachers to use either independently or as part of a formal professional development programme facilitated by an expert literacy adviser or the school's literacy leader. It would be essential that such a package focused on best practice and included explicit instruction on the approaches needed to work effectively with children who are underachieving.

The Literacy Taskforce recommends that the Ministry of Education develop a comprehensive professional development package to assist teachers to implement best practice in their teaching of reading and writing.

Literacy leadership in schools

The taskforce discussed the importance of literacy leadership within the school – a teacher or teachers with expertise in literacy learning having responsibility to provide guidance and support in classrooms as well as in the staff meetings that are part of the regular professional development of teachers.¹¹ To do this, literacy leaders need a

¹⁰ ERIC (the Early Reading In-service Course) was a comprehensive package available to junior school teachers and supported by the Reading Advisors and in-service courses for teachers.

¹¹ The taskforce recognised that the literacy leader could be the principal. In Māori-medium education, the literacy expert might be an external advisor, given the current expectations on Māori teachers.

thorough understanding of best practice, including the theoretical ideas that underpin best practice and their evolving status.

A particular responsibility of the literacy leadership should be to evaluate the effectiveness of literacy programmes¹² at the classroom level and for those children needing additional support. The taskforce was concerned that it is possible for schools to be using many different literacy programmes without knowing enough about their effectiveness in meeting the needs of children and suggests that literacy leaders develop the expertise needed to do this evaluation.

The Literacy Taskforce recommends that support and advice be provided to develop literacy leadership in schools. The taskforce considers that such support is best provided through a nationally co-ordinated service.

Professional leadership in schools

The professional leadership in the school is responsible for setting goals and aspirations. Members of the taskforce felt the need to make the point that this leadership must include the principal, who, as professional leader, should have a thorough understanding of how learners learn as well as the ways in which the school should be organised and the teachers supported to achieve the best results possible. For example, the taskforce considered that only in the most exceptional circumstances should beginning teachers be given new entrant classes because of the particular skills and experience needed to teach these children.

In considering the role of the principal in relation to literacy learning, the Literacy Taskforce expressed its concern about the particular pressures faced by principals of lower decile schools.

The Literacy Taskforce recommends that appropriate materials and opportunities be provided for principals to allow them to update their understanding of literacy learning.

Specific Interventions

The Literacy Taskforce agreed that, even with best practice in every classroom, effective intervention programmes are still needed for children who will benefit from more intensive, specialised teaching. This need is most likely to arise in the first year of instruction but may arise later for some children, particularly those with poor oral skills in the language of instruction.

The taskforce stressed that intervention is not inoculation, and its success depends on ongoing effective teaching in the classroom. The presence of effective intervention programmes must not lessen the importance of best practice in the classroom.

¹² The generic term "programme" includes teaching approaches, materials for children, and total packages (for example, computer-assisted learning programmes) as well as the sequence of activities that the teacher plans for the class, a group, or an individual.

Current interventions that provide specialist assistance include Reading Recovery, Resource Teachers of Reading, Resource Teachers of Māori, and the Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour. The taskforce focused on the first two of these, although it acknowledged the significance of the latter two. In particular, some members of the taskforce stressed that their preference was for the Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour to focus as much on learning as they did on behaviour – particularly since most of their work in learning was concerned with developing literacy skills in limited-progress children. The taskforce also acknowledged that the Resource Teachers of Māori carry a significant workload in that they are expected to provide advice and support across all essential learning areas of the curriculum.

Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery is internationally recognised as one of the most successful acceleration and intervention programmes to support children making limited progress in reading. The Literacy Taskforce acknowledged the strengths of Reading Recovery and agreed that it must remain an essential feature of New Zealand's education system.

However, members of the taskforce raised several issues about the programme itself and the way in which it is currently implemented. These issues were as follows:

The Reading Recovery programme is used with the lowest 20% of children compared with their cohort in an individual school. The taskforce believes that, in order to make the best use of available resources, Reading Recovery should be targeted to children with the greatest need, particularly those in lower decile schools. Further, the taskforce was concerned that a combination of factors can lead to higher decile schools having more Reading Recovery trained teachers than lower decile schools, thus compounding the problems of accessibility for children most at risk of underachieving.

The taskforce also considered that the stage at which Reading Recovery is delivered could be more flexible. For some children, it might be beneficial to participate in the programme earlier than the end of the first year of instruction; others might take longer than this first year to develop their oral language skills to a point where they can make the maximum gains from the programme.

For Māori children in general classes, the taskforce emphasised that cultural affirmation by Reading Recovery teachers is an important element of the teaching.

Members of the taskforce believe that some children with learning difficulties have specific needs that cannot be met through Reading Recovery. Although Reading Recovery can identify these children, they need a different programme.

Despite Reading Recovery being heavily researched overseas, the taskforce was concerned that only two research studies have been carried out on the programme in New Zealand independently of the programme's own monitoring and research. This is considered to be insufficient to identify any trends indicating the need for refinements or improvements.

The taskforce considered that a literal translation of an English intervention programme such as Reading Recovery is inappropriate for Māori-medium education. Instead, an

effective, appropriate intervention needs to be researched and developed for this medium.¹³ The taskforce agreed that it is critical that Māori initiate, develop, trial, and implement this intervention.

Resource Teachers of Reading

The Literacy Taskforce affirmed the work of the Resource Teachers of Reading, agreeing that the service is a critical intervention for those children who are hardest to teach. The taskforce noted with concern that the current level of resourcing is insufficient to meet demand.

Members of the taskforce also noted that there is variability in the qualifications and experience of Resource Teachers of Reading because of the way in which they have been appointed to their positions. Despite working with the hardest-to-teach children, Resource Teachers of Reading are not required to have specialist training. The taskforce believes mandatory specialist training should be considered.

A Nationally Co-ordinated System

The Literacy Taskforce believes that a nationally co-ordinated and managed system of second- and third-phase interventions is the most effective and efficient way of providing consistent, specialised instruction for the children most at risk of failing to learn to read and write for success. Such a system would also provide a way of gathering reliable data for monitoring progress towards the goal. The taskforce considered that the current nationally funded interventions, Reading Recovery and the Resource Teachers of Reading, should form the basis of this system but that changes would need to be considered to the programmes and operation of each to ensure consistency in targeting and equity of access.

This system should articulate with services being provided to schools by the Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour.

The Literacy Taskforce recommends that a nationally co-ordinated system of interventions targeted at those most in need be established by reviewing and building on the interventions that already exist, in particular, Reading Recovery and the Resource Teachers of Reading.

Parents and the Community

Learning is enhanced when teachers know something of children's home language experiences. Partnerships between school and home are not one-way, and schools should be seeking information from children's homes as well as providing parents and whānau with information. The taskforce acknowledged that getting parents involved in school activities is a priority, although it can also be a challenge, particularly if parents are not successful readers and writers themselves, their experiences at schools have

¹³ Time is needed first to implement recently developed assessment procedures.

been mostly negative, or their home language is different from the language of instruction for their children.

Helping parents to gain confidence in their own abilities to help their children's literacy is important. However, the school is not necessarily the best environment in which to do this. For this reason, the taskforce supported the proposed public information campaign and was pleased to contribute to the development of its themes and messages.

The Literacy Taskforce was also concerned about the impact of such social conditions as health and housing on children's learning. The ability of many children to learn is affected because they are hungry or sick, have conditions such as glue ear, or are not regularly attending the same school. The taskforce therefore supported the alignment of broader social policy and better co-ordination between the social agencies supporting the families most at risk.

The Literacy Taskforce also affirmed those schools that are facilitating links with the early childhood services in their areas so that children's transition to school is as smooth as possible.

How Should Progress towards the Goal Be Measured?

Monitoring progress towards the goal has three aspects:

teachers' monitoring of individual children's progress towards the goal;

schools' collective monitoring of their pupils' progress to ensure that their teaching and learning programmes will best enable individual pupils to reach the goal;

the Government's monitoring of the system's progress toward this goal over the period to 2005 and beyond.

Teachers' monitoring of individual children

The literacy levels of individual children are strongly influenced by the quality of the interaction between the child and the teacher. Good teachers carry out monitoring, analysis, and reflection as an integral part of their teaching.

The taskforce was therefore concerned about the wide range of teacher expertise in monitoring and assessment. If monitoring is to be useful, then it must not only be used by teachers to diagnose and report on children's strengths and weaknesses but should also inform them about their own teaching practice and interactions with children in both individual and group instruction. Anecdotal evidence indicates that although detailed data is gathered, it may not be analysed or used to improve teaching programmes.

The taskforce believes that monitoring and assessment must be ongoing so that children having difficulties can be identified and helped. Any assessment must be informative to the teacher and parents and it must therefore be carried out on tasks appropriate to children's capabilities. So that assessment data can inform a new school when children move, the taskforce would like the Ministry of Education to investigate the possibility of having cumulative records travel with a child from school to school.

As with all students, teachers' monitoring of Māori and Pacific Islands students must also be sensitive to, and affirm, their prior knowledge and experience. The taskforce noted that diagnostic tools and monitoring procedures are being developed for use in Māori-medium classrooms, but that these need more research and development. However, the taskforce noted that there have been no externally referenced assessment tools developed for use in Pacific Islands languages education.¹⁴

The Literacy Taskforce notes that monitoring and assessment of individual children is an ongoing and integral part of teaching practice and therefore recommends that assessment be an essential component of teacher education.

The Literacy Taskforce recommends that research be undertaken to support the development of diagnostic tools for use in Māori-medium education.

Schools' collective monitoring of their pupils' progress

Currently, there is no common system throughout New Zealand for assessing reading and writing. In reading, such common tools as running records are used and analysed by teachers in a variety of ways.

Externally referenced assessment tools enable schools to see where their children are in relation to other children of the same age. The taskforce considers that it is important that schools use such tools and that they analyse and collate the data they collect so that they are very clear about the progress and achievement of their students and are able to report on this to parents as well as using the information to develop appropriate instructional programmes.

The taskforce supported the Ministry of Education's proposal to develop exemplars for the achievement objectives related to reading and writing in English in the New Zealand Curriculum so that teachers are clearer about the standards that should be achieved at each level of the curriculum.

The taskforce reiterated that providing a description of the knowledge, understandings, strategies, and attitudes that nine-year-olds should demonstrate when they are reading and writing for success, along with examples of texts that children are reading and of children's writing, will help clarify expectations of student achievement.

The Literacy Taskforce recommends the development of further externally referenced assessment tools so that they are available to assess progress and achievement in literacy in each of the first four years of instruction.

The Literacy Taskforce recommends that externally referenced assessment tools be developed for use in Māori-medium education.

¹⁴ The taskforce noted that the priority for development in Pacific Islands languages is the development of reading materials for children.

The Government's monitoring of the system's progress

Standard procedures and appropriate assessment tools, in both English and Māori, are necessary if progress towards the goal is to be measured.

The Literacy Taskforce would prefer to see the further development of externally referenced tools that would enable light sampling to take place as well as provide information to schools about how their students compare with the national cohort rather than a national testing regime for all students.¹⁵ The taskforce considered the possibility of the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) being used for such monitoring but decided that it does not meet this purpose.¹⁶

Diagnostic surveys, such as that used to screen children for Reading Recovery (the 6 year net), also provide useful data at a national level.

The Literacy Taskforce recommends that schools be required to use externally referenced assessment tools on an annual basis and that this data be sampled to monitor the system's progress towards the goal.

Reading, Writing, and Mathematics Proposals Pool

The Government asked the Literacy Taskforce to recommend criteria for the distribution of funds available to schools from the Reading, Writing, and Mathematics Proposals Pool. The funds are to assist schools to meet the set-up costs of programmes that they are sure will meet the particular needs of children identified as making limited progress. Furthermore, it is the Government's wish that such programmes involve parents and the community.

The Literacy Taskforce was concerned that schools do not add more literacy programmes without being very clear about the way in which they will make a difference to the progress and achievement of their students. There is evidence now that some schools are using programmes without adequately evaluating their effectiveness. The

¹⁵ Externally referenced assessment tools currently used by schools include School Entry Assessment/Aro Matawai Urunga-à-Kura (SEA/AKA), Six Year Diagnostic Survey (6 year net), Burt Word Recognition Test, and Progressive Achievement Tests (PATs).

¹⁶ The NEMP uses soundly based assessment methods in a sample range of schools, but it is not administered on an annual basis. It reports on actual, not expected, performance. It would therefore need modification for more frequent monitoring of reading, written language, and mathematics and include assessment items that have been agreed to be appropriate indicators of the goal having been met.

taskforce considered that this not only wastes the school's resources but, in particular, is also not a good use of children's time, especially when they need to make rapid progress to close the gaps in achievement.

The taskforce would prefer that Government funds to support literacy learning be used to develop teachers' expertise, for example, through the development of literacy leaders or a self-directed professional development package, or be used to expand the specialist resource available to work intensively with children, especially for decile 1 and decile 2 schools.

Because decisions about appropriate programmes are best made at the school level, the taskforce did not accept the task of determining a list of programmes that are deemed to be suitable. However, members were concerned about aspects of the approach and quality of some of the programmes and materials currently being marketed to schools. This concern reinforces their earlier recommendation that schools be provided with statements of best practice to guide them in their decision making.

The taskforce was also concerned that decile 1 and decile 2 schools currently face such pressures that the system for submitting proposals must be as straightforward as possible.

The Literacy Taskforce recommends that the Reading, Writing, and Mathematics Proposals Pool be limited to decile 1 and decile 2 schools in this financial year, opening out to other schools in the following years but with priority being given to lower decile schools. The criteria for funding are listed below.

Criteria to be met for funds from the Reading, Writing, and Mathematics Pool

The Reading, Writing, and Mathematics Proposals Pool is for programmes to be used with students in years 1 to 6 in primary schools. Proposals must:

- provide evidence that the needs of the target group have been clearly identified;
- provide a rationale for how the programme will meet the needs that have been identified;
- describe how the programme reflects best practice;
- describe how the programme will further develop teacher expertise;
- describe how the programme will be sustained (bearing in mind that schools will be eligible for funding for a maximum of two years);
- provide evidence of the commitment and involvement of parents and the community.

Schools that have received extra Crown funding for similar purposes, for example, through the School Support Project or the Innovations Pool, will not be eligible.

Appendix A

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Convenor: Howard Fancy, Secretary for Education

Officials: Sue Douglas, Ministry of Education

Diane Crew, Ministry of Education

Terms of reference

The initial terms of reference for the Literacy Taskforce were to:

provide advice on how the literacy goal should be defined;

provide advice on how progress towards the literacy goal should be measured;

identify and provide information to the Ministry and Minister on effective initiatives to improve reading literacy and written language, particularly for groups that are not doing as well as others (Māori children, Pacific Islands children, and those for whom English is not the home language);

consider whether any additional curriculum support materials are needed and provide advice on those materials;

develop criteria for programmes and resources that can be accessed by schools through the reading and mathematics proposals pool.

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Appendix B

Reading for success

Successful reading at age nine means reading appropriate texts fluently, independently, and with comprehension. In an instructional setting (with teacher guidance), readers may cope with more difficult texts. For example, a scientific article may contain specialist vocabulary, and the teacher may introduce these in a discussion with students before the reading.

A nine-year-old reading for success:

- has the habit of reading for meaning well established
- has clear concepts about print and an understanding of the form and structure of written texts, for example, punctuation, use of paragraphing, tables of contents, indexes, and lists
- has a good reading vocabulary, that is, a thorough grasp of high frequency words (such as some, like) and is continually expanding their personal bank of words
- has the skills to decode (work out) words that may be familiar in spoken vocabulary but not in print using phonics (letter-sound relationships)
- uses a range of sources of information in the text to gain meaning, for example, the context or setting, illustrations, diagrams, and captions
- knows how to use their own background knowledge and experience to bring meaning to text
- can apply an understanding of how language works to develop the meaning of text, for example, is familiar with the order of words/grammar
- can predict, check, confirm, and self-correct while they are reading
- has the confidence to take a risk when reading, that is, will “have a go”
- is enthusiastic about reading a wide range of texts
- reads for both enjoyment and information
- sometimes reads from choice when there are other recreational options
- thinks critically about what is being read, that is, can get under the surface of the words, analyses and interprets what the author is saying
- can share and discuss their thoughts and reactions to a range of texts confidently, for example, how they felt about a character in a story
- recognises that authors and illustrators have different styles and will often have developed preferences and be able to say why
- can read aloud with expressions and fluency
- can retell something they have read and identify the main idea of a piece of writing and a sequence of events
- can gather information on a topic from a variety of sources, such as catalogues, libraries, and encyclopedias, and uses dictionaries and other reference tools

Texts for nine-year-olds may include:

- whole pages without illustration

- some complex sentences and varied vocabulary, for example, compound words such as “wheelchair”
- some complexity in the story and illustrations
- technical or specialist content
- a combination of narrative text, diagrams, and explanatory notes
- themes involving other times and places.

Children’s understanding of what they read is affected by their background of experience – they relate more readily to the text they are reading if they are familiar with the setting, for example, a farm, a sporting event such as kirikiti, a marae, a tangi, or an inner-city highrise.

The Literacy Taskforce recommends that the description of the goal includes examples of the types of texts that nine-year-olds should be reading.

Writing for success

After four years at school, a writer is well versed in the way in which language “works”. The child knows that what he/she thinks or says can be written down – but is also aware of the transformation in taking oral language to a written form. They have a knowledge of grammar, of punctuation, and of the way in which other writers use language for different purposes and for impact. They are aware that writers write for audiences. To this end, they are able to select appropriate forms for their writing and include such elements as interesting leads (story beginnings), strong endings, appropriate verbs and adjectives, and appropriate vocabulary for the form and develop their writing with the reader in mind.

A nine-year-old writing for success:

- has a bank of high-frequency words and experiments with words outside this bank
- continually adds new words to their vocabulary bank
- consistently makes informed attempts at spelling
- understands written language features (comma, full stop, capital letters, paragraphs, and exclamation and question marks)
- is developing an awareness of the purposes of quotation marks
- recounts an event and writes instructions and explanations
- can write from a personal point of view about their experiences and observations
- writes on a variety of topics
- writes using a variety of forms, for example, stories, poems, letters, and recipes
- chooses a form of writing appropriate to the purpose and the intended reader

- can use language to express imaginative and creative ideas
- is beginning to set out ideas in a logical way (to argue a point of view or to persuade the reader)
- is beginning to use the power of language through similes and manipulation of sentence structure
- sees the sharing of writing as a way of getting feedback from the reader
- has the confidence to take a risk during the writing process (to “have a go”)
- is enthusiastic about writing in a range of forms
- is able to add, change, delete, and reorder the language to make sense, for grammar and for impact
- understands some parts of speech (word classes) and their functions, for example, noun, verb, adjective, pronoun, preposition, and adverb.

The Literacy Taskforce recommends that the description of the goal include examples of the types of texts that nine-year-olds should be constructing.

Appendix C

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Reading Literacy Study (1990)

The IEA international reading survey (1990) showed that, overall, New Zealand students at age nine perform well above the international average in literacy achievement, but deeper analysis of the overall results shows that there are significant disparities between sub-groups.

There is a wide gap between the highest and lowest levels of reading achievement and a significant difference between the average performance of Māori and Pacific Islands students and that of others. Māori performed significantly below the international average, and Māori boys performed at a level below that of Māori girls. On average, Māori students outperformed Pacific Islands students. Wagemaker (1992) reports that on three comprehension tasks, there were large significant differences between Pākehā and Māori children (mean differences of around eleven percent items correct), and Pākehā and Pacific Islands children (mean differences of around fifteen percent items correct). Differences were not present on the word recognition task.

Children whose home language is not the language of instruction have markedly lower literacy levels than other children. Out of thirty-two systems of education, New Zealand has the largest gap in achievement between children who are learning in their home language and those who are not (many of whom were Pacific Islands children). A reanalysis by Wilkinson (1998) revealed significant differences between these children on both comprehension and word recognition. The differences remained after controlling for socio-economic status. Pākehā students had significantly higher scores on comprehension and word recognition after controlling for socio-economic status. Limited relationships between word recognition and comprehension were found, and socio-economic status was significantly related to both measures.

New Zealand also had the second largest score difference between gender groups when compared with other countries in the study.

Wagemaker, H. "Preliminary findings of the IEA literacy study: New Zealand achievement in the national and international context." *Educational Psychology* 12 (3&4) 1992, : pp. 195-214.

Wilkinson, I.A.G. "Dealing with diversity: Achievement gaps in reading literacy among New Zealand students." *Reading Research Quarterly* 35 (2), 1998. pp: 144-168.

International Adult Literacy Survey (1997)

This survey, which was the first comprehensive study of its type in New Zealand, was conducted in March 1996 as part of a series of international surveys known as the International Adult Literacy Survey. It surveyed a random sample of 4223 adults ranging in age from sixteen to sixty-five years and used a wide range of prose, document, and quantitative literacy texts containing the type of information that people encounter in everyday circumstances .

The results show that around one in five New Zealanders is operating at a highly effective level of literacy, able to manage abstract concepts and employ specialised knowledge in interpreting information. Over half of New Zealand adults are operating at a level considered to be a requirement to meet the demands of “everyday life”.

However, of particular concern is the high concentration of adults with very poor literacy skills (around one in five New Zealanders). There are, overall, poorer literacy skills among the unemployed. Poor literacy was also found to be concentrated within the Pacific Islands and other ethnic minority groups and within the Māori population. Results for Pacific Islands and other ethnic minority groups were reflected in the relatively poor English skills of those for whom English was not their first language.

Ministry of Education. Adult literacy in New Zealand: Results from the International Adult Literacy Survey

National Education Monitoring Project (Monitoring Report 6: Reading and Speaking Assessment Results, 1996)

The results of this project confirmed the lower performance of Māori compared with non-Māori on reading tasks. It also found examples of inverse relationships between performance and the proportion of Māori on school rolls. Schools with Pacific Islands students were in a similar situation. In addition, the project found that, in general, there were significant differences in performance between students in the low-decile grouping (deciles 1 to 3) and those in the middle- and high-decile groupings.

Approximately twenty percent of the national sample in NEMP were below “expected bands” in oral reading on measures of decoding and comprehension. (Whereas ten percent were considered to be just below expected bands, a further ten percent were of particular concern.) Significant differences were found between schools (decile 1–3 versus the rest), and significant differences were found between Māori and non-Māori on all ten oral and silent reading tasks and on one of four speaking tasks. Significant differences between Pacific Islands and non-Pacific Islands children are indicated, based on school comparisons.

Flockton, L. and Crooks, T. Reading and Speaking Assessment Results 1996: National Education Monitoring Report 6. Wellington: Ministry of Education. 1997.