



Briefing Note: *Shine* Literacy Initiative and the Massey University Early Literacy Project

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	12 September 2019	Priority:	Medium
Security Level:	In Confidence	METIS No:	1204770
Drafter:	Isobel Connelly	DDI:	s 9(2)(a)
Key Contact:	Pauline Cleaver	DDI:	
Messaging seen by Communications team:	No	Round Robin:	No

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is for you to:

Note the further information provided which supports a request under the Official Information Act 1982 from John Cody, of the *Shine* Literacy Initiative (received 28 July 2019, and due to the requestor on 20 September 2019).

Note some additional information on the Ministry's approach to literacy teaching and learning in schools.

Agree that this Briefing will be proactively released.

Agree / Disagree

Summary

- You have requested some further information to support a request under the Official Information Act 1982 from John Cody, of the *Shine* Literacy Initiative (received 28 July 2019, and due to the requestor on 20 September 2019).
- The teaching and learning of reading has long been the subject of debate between proponents of a phonics emphasis, and a whole language emphasis.
- Joy Allcock (of the *Shine* Literacy Initiative) had been working with Titahi Bay School from 2009 to address low literacy achievement results. Joy's approach was based on research that showed many children can benefit from explicit instruction in the foundations of literacy development (including an understanding of the alphabetic code). Joy contacted the education research team at Massey University to share what she was doing.

- On the basis of this work, the Massey University research team contacted the Ministry of Education to discuss funding to run a two-year study to see if they could replicate the results. Joy Allcock contacted the Minister's office at this time to seek support for Massey to undertake this research.
- The Ministry is reviewing and enhancing all our literacy supports to ensure current knowledge about effective teaching and learning is reflected, that supports are responsive to the needs of today's and tomorrow's children, and every teacher is equipped to provide high impact teaching.

Release

Pauline Cleaver
Deputy Secretary (Acting)
Early Learning and Group

12/09/2019

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

/ /

Background

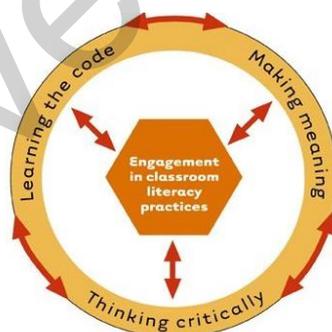
1. The Ministry received a request under the Official Information Act (OIA) 1982 from John Cody, of the *Shine* Literacy Initiative on 28 July 2019 (OIA 200620 refers). This is due to the requestor on 20 September 2019.
2. Your office has asked for an outline of what happened regarding *Shine* and the Massey Project, as well as further information on the Ministry's more balanced approach to teaching reading in schools.

Effective reading instruction

3. Effective reading instruction acknowledges that both word recognition and language comprehension should be taught in each literacy lesson¹, and that this should be done based on the learner's current, individual needs (METIS 1200100 refers).
4. Teachers also need clear guidance to be able to provide the structured, systematic teaching of phonics and phonemic awareness that some children need²

Whole language versus phonics

5. The teaching and learning of reading has long been the subject of debate between proponents of a whole language emphasis in reading, and phonics emphasis:
 - a. Whole language proponents believe that the emphasis should be on learning whole words and phrases by encountering them in meaningful contexts.
 - b. Phonics proponents believe the whole language approach doesn't pay sufficient attention to the teaching and learning of phonological and phonemic awareness (the code).
6. Our work programme is about addressing the balance, and ensuring teachers are fully supported to make sure beginning readers are able to develop the skills and knowledge they need to become competent readers, according to their individual needs, and as outlined in the Framework for Literacy Acquisition:



3

Shine Literacy Initiative and the Massey University Early Literacy Project

Concerns about New Zealand's literacy strategy

7. The Ministry has a long history with Professor James Chapman and Distinguished Professor Bill Tunmer. Professor Chapman was a member of the Literacy Experts Group, convened in late 1998 by the then Secretary for Education, to provide advice

¹ *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1 to 4*. Ministry of Education 2003.

² [Massey University Early Literacy Research Project](#) (August 2019).

³ With teacher support, students develop knowledge and strategies and also an awareness of how to use them as readers and writers (*Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1-4*)

to the Ministry on literacy and literacy instruction. Professors Chapman and Tunmer were also part of a national Literacy Advisory Group that was convened in 2005.

8. Professors Chapman and Tunmer have long been critical of the lack of systematic, de-contextualised phonemic focus in Reading Recovery⁴, the resources the Ministry provides to schools, and also our approach to teachers' professional development in this area.
9. Professors Chapman and Tunmer, along with fellow researchers, released a report in 2013 titled "*Why the New Zealand National Literacy Strategy has failed and what can be done about it*". In this report, they state that three factors have contributed to the failure of New Zealand's literacy strategy:
 1. a constructivist orientation towards literacy education
 2. the failure to respond adequately to differences in literate capital at school entry
 3. restrictive policies regarding the first year of literacy teaching.
10. At this time the Ministry was reviewing evidence, to ensure a more strategic response, focused on looking at the whole literacy system of supports⁵, and what works to ensure all children become readers.
11. In April 2013, we received a request for the Ministry to support a literacy study to be conducted by researchers at Massey University. This request included an outline of what was happening at Titahi Bay School, and a request for funding to scale up this work.

The genesis of the Massey University Early Literacy project

12. Joy Allcock had been working with Titahi Bay School from 2009, helping them to address low literacy achievement results. Joy contacted the education research team at Massey University to show them the results from her work. Because these results appeared to be so promising, the Massey University research team wanted to run a two-year study to see if they could be replicated.
13. It was at this point that the Ministry was contacted by Professors Chapman and Tunmer (approx. April 2013) to discuss their proposed research project. At this time, Joy also contacted the Minister's office to seek support for the Massey team to undertake this research.
14. Chapman and Tunmer contacted us again in September 2013, urging us to consider the merits of their proposed research. They also drew attention to a report that had recently been released by the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, Sir Peter Gluckman. In his report, Gluckman argued for 'more robust, empirical research to underpin evidence-based policy formation.'
15. Ministry officials met with Chapman and Tunmer in September 2013 to discuss their proposed research. In May 2014, the Ministry of Education and Massey University signed a Statement of Work, contracting Massey to carry out a longitudinal research study with new entrant and Year 1 children in literacy instruction. The Ministry worked with Massey in 2014 to randomly select schools to participate, before beginning the research proper in 2015⁶.

⁴ They assert that it does not devote enough attention to phonological awareness and letter-sound patterns, and doesn't adequately consider that children from lower socio-economic, and culturally-diverse backgrounds, often have lower levels of "literate cultural capital" than middle class children. It also doesn't come into effect until children begin their second year of education.

⁵ Reading Recovery, Resource Teachers of Literacy (RTLit), Reading Together, RTLBs and Programmes for Students

⁶ Some Wellington schools, including in Titahi Bay, that had been involved in the SHINE Initiative were deemed to be out of scope of Massey's research, so as to ensure the effects of the respective research projects could be effectively measured and attributed.

16. The contract between Massey University and the Ministry was an opportunity for us to see whether the approach they had long advocated would be effective in improving literacy outcomes, and reducing the literacy achievement gap in New Zealand.

The Ministry's continued contact with *Shine*

17. The Ministry continued to have ad hoc contact with Joy Allcock as an independent consultant, looking for funding for her work, as well as for the collaboration with the *Shine* Literacy Initiative. We agreed to provide teacher relief day funding for the Initiative in 2014/15 so that teachers could take part in professional development. We also advised Joy that she could submit a proposal to become part of the new panel of PLD providers who employ accredited facilitators to deliver PLD to schools and kura.
18. In March 2018, Minister Martin met with John Cody. A couple of potential avenues were put forward as suggestions for the *Shine* Literacy Initiative to explore, including Networks of Expertise, providing feedback on our curriculum support programmes that were undergoing a review, and joining the Kōrero Matauranga (METIS 115115 refers).

The Ministry's approach to reading teaching and learning in schools

19. Massey University Early Literacy project is underpinned by the Cognitive Foundations of Learning to Read framework (METIS 1200100 refers). This framework combines the cognitive elements underpinning the development of the language comprehension and word recognition components of the Simple View of Reading (SVR). The SVR shows that, while reading is a complex activity, it can be represented as two interdependent processes: word recognition (decoding) and language comprehension. Skilled reading is a combination of both processes.
20. The research was undertaken to address, among other things, the 'Matthew effect'. That is, children who start school with less literacy knowledge typically make less progress than their more knowledgeable peers, and the gap between the two groups widens over time. Children from low socio-economic areas, those with learning support needs, Māori and Pacific children, and children who are English language learners are over-represented in the 'long tail' of underachievement in New Zealand.
21. Massey's research, along with a wealth of other national and international evidence, shows that too many children don't learn to read through context and meaning alone. Some children need a systematic, phonics-based approach to learn to read. Some children won't need this extra instruction when learning to read, however attention to small units in early reading instruction is *helpful for all children, harmful for none, and crucial for some*⁷.

What are we doing in response to this?

22. We recently provided you with an update on *Initiatives in Primary-Level Literacy* (METIS 1201789, August 2019, refers). We are reviewing and enhancing all our literacy supports to ensure current knowledge about effective teaching and learning is reflected, that supports are responsive to the needs of today's and tomorrow's children, and every teacher is equipped to provide high impact teaching. There is a particular focus on embedding practices and supports that will better meet the needs of diverse learners, drawing on national and international evidence.

⁷ *Teaching Children to read: what do we know about how to do it?* Snow and Juel 2005.

23. The Ministry regularly contracts and works with a range of subject matter experts in all learning areas, including literacy. We are currently refreshing the *Ready to Read Instructional Series*⁸. We follow an open and transparent tender process to procure our providers.

Proactive Release

24. We recommend that this Briefing is proactively released as per your expectation that information be released as soon as possible. Any information which may need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

⁸ The series will be updated to include new simple, effective, decodable texts in the early readers. They will include clear guidance for teachers to provide the structured, systematic teaching of phonics and phonemic awareness that some children need. We are still working through the current RFP round, and a successful supplier has not yet been selected (we will notify you when this happens).



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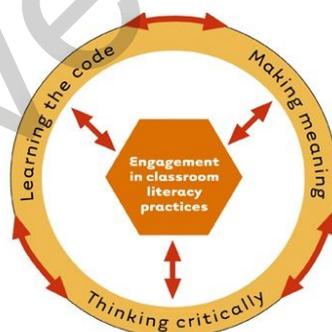
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