

Our current position on Reading Recovery

As it stands, Lifting Literacy Aotearoa does not recommend Reading Recovery for any dyslexic or struggling learner and we have major concerns about the compatibility of such a programme alongside a structured literacy approach. We also have concerns over the value for money of this type of intensive and costly intervention.

More detail needed on the changes being made to Reading Recovery

We were very interested in Associate Minister Jan Tinetti's comments on The Breakfast Show on 12 August about changes to Reading Recovery and how *"there is room for both [structured literacy and reading recovery] in the system, and there must be room for both"*.

To understand the thinking behind that very strong position we need to see a lot more detail on the changes being made to Reading Recovery that were first signalled in December last year. What the Ministry has on its TKI website, and what we have been hearing from schools that use Reading Recovery, does not give us the information we need to understand how Reading Recovery can be made compatible with the findings from the science of reading and the principles of a structured literacy approach.

Up till now we have chosen to remain largely silent on the merits or otherwise of Reading Recovery. We had hoped that the science and the real world data we have been collecting and sharing from schools in New Zealand that have switched to a fully structured literacy approach would be enough to provide the evidence to support a total re-evaluation of the value of Reading Recovery.

We certainly welcome more conversation about what the changes being made to Reading Recover are, and urge the Ministry of Education to keep evidence at the heart of any amendment to Reading Recovery practice.

Our intention is not to criticise Reading Recovery teachers, or to disregard their commitment to children and their learning. We want the best support for those teachers to receive the very best training in up-to-date evidence based teaching practices so that they can form part of a consistent, aligned, evidence-based and cost effective model of delivery of reading and writing instruction across the system. There is a need for more literacy specialists in the system and we would urge the Government to consider bolstering the RTLit network, rather than continuing to invest in the third-party Reading Recovery network.

Our concerns with Reading Recovery

The approach used in Reading Recovery is based on the three cueing approach. This approach may work for some students but it is clear it does not work for many other learners. In contrast, a structured literacy approach has been shown, over and over again, to work for pretty much every student and prevents students from struggling unnecessarily. So it baffles us as to why would we continue to use Reading Recovery when a superior alternative exists?

A structured literacy approach is also a complete approach - from tier 1 whole class instruction to tier 3 one-on-one intervention. The Ministry has already signalled a move towards a structured literacy approach for tier 1 whole class teaching for Year 0-1 and the Literacy Strategy in development is expected to recommend extending that approach across all year levels. There is therefore no need for any other bolt-on remedial programmes. We can therefore only assume that the Ministry intends to completely morph Reading Recovery into a fully-fledged structured literacy approach. Anything less than this just does not make sense. You either accept the science of reading evidence base and a structured literacy approach or you don't. You can't pick and choose research and approaches. There needs to be complete alignment and consistency of approaches across year levels and across the tiers of intervention.

There is a lack of transparency over the changes being made to Reading Recovery. The Literacy Strategy needs to address this issue head on and use scientific evidence as its guiding light.

What we want to see

1. Full details of the changes being made to Reading Recovery; how they are compatible with a structured literacy approach; and how they are going to be implemented with fidelity and monitored;
2. A cost-benefit analysis of (a) an amended Reading Recovery and Early Literacy Support approach versus (b) an approach solely based on a whole school structured literacy approach across all year levels and all tiers of intervention and with the support of a bolstered RTLit network.



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Feedback from the public to Associate Minister Jan Tinetti's comments on The Breakfast Show:

Also see our guest blog post by James Chapman, Emeritus Professor of Educational Psychology at Massey University: [The Claimed Success of Reading Recovery is Based Largely on a Myth](#)

"It's not just change for change's sake. We now know better. Structured Literacy is based on research, good solid scientific research, and many of us who work at the chalk face can see it working. I have been a Tier 2 reading intervention teacher for 8 years. It is what I do all day at school, then I come home and continue tutoring students in my own time. The first 3 years I was a balanced Literacy (whole language) advocate. I believed that children in intervention just had to be exposed to more books and get their "mileage" up and then they would become fluent readers. I became disillusioned when the progress was slow. Then my own son was diagnosed as dyslexic. He was a Reading Recovery victim. I struggled to understand why RR had not worked for him, so I went looking for answers. And, boy, did I find some answers! Structured Literacy has totally changed the way I teach. I could NEVER go back, knowing what I know now. I would find it morally wrong to teach using balanced Literacy, knowing I was statistically failing 30-40% of my students. I was concerned with the Minister's comments that "Better Start was based on structured literacy principles". This is not the same as saying it IS Structured Literacy. For those of us that know what gold standard looks like now, we will not settle for bronze standard. Our tamariki deserve so much better." - Literacy intervention teacher

"This was a great start to the conversation about literacy for ALL our children. It was great to hear the Minister admit to the need for change and that the Better Start program was "based on the principles of structured literacy" this is true, but it does NOT align with them. It was also encouraging to hear the Minister talk about her expectation for the Ministry of Education to follow the science and achieve a "strategy that is based on the best evidence, both internationally and nationally" because quite frankly there is no debate here; Structured Literacy IS that strategy and the evidence for that is overwhelming. So thank you Minister Jan Tinetti for confirming what many already know. If she, and the Ministry of Education are true to their word on finding that evidence based, undeniable strategy, then we will see ALL children in NZ taught under a Structured Literacy approach. As a parent of two



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amazing children, I look forward to the day when we see the Minister follow through on her words today.”

“I think there is an issue of pride, and I think that comes at the expense of trust. So many children and families have been failed by reading recovery, so many teachers know it doesn't align with the science, how can they trust a revised version of it with the reading recovery name? To achieve the huge pedagogical shift that Penny identified is required for the change to Structured Literacy, I think schools, teachers, and parents need really clear guidance from MoE on what is recommended and what isn't. For that to be effective, surely MoE need to admit that what has been happening in schools is unhelpful/harmful to many children, together with a very clear new evidence-based plan for tiers 1, 2 and 3 moving forward. And we haven't seen any of this yet. Retaining the name reading recovery and a slightly modified program doesn't provide this all-important clarity for schools.” - literacy teacher

“The obvious value in teaching structured literacy is that ALL children can learn to read – no children are excluded from learning (sadly this is not the case with the current MoE funded Balanced Literacy approach). But the big picture here is also very important, and this was touched on by Penny O'Brien this morning – Penny noted that not only are her school's literacy rates improving but so too are ATTENDANCE rates and the EMOTIONAL WELLBEING of her students.

Teaching all children to read in a way that means all children achieve success will have far reaching benefits throughout our entire society, not just in our schools – better reading skills means access to more job opportunities, more job opportunities means less reliance on unemployment benefits, better self-esteem and less anxiety towards school means less truancy and less demand on our mental health system, and all these things together should have a positive effect on our crime statistics.

Investing in our teachers to learn how to teach using a structured literacy approach, and giving our children the best platform for success, benefits every single New Zealander!

I urge you to please keep the momentum about structured literacy going – we need this change to be made now!”

“It's both a promising start that the Minister Jan Tinetti MP is engaging, but very disappointing to see she doesn't have a full grasp on what Structured Literacy



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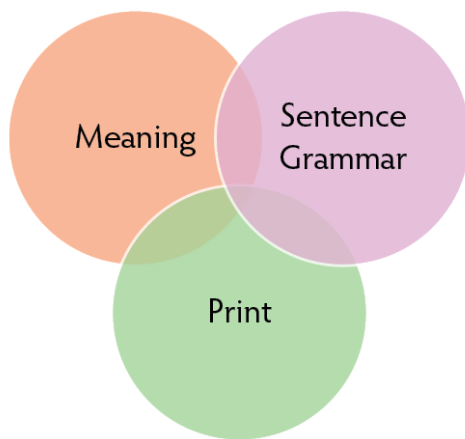
pedagogy is. The term was coined and trademarked by The International Dyslexia Association and yet, by Canterbury University's own admission, the 'efforts' made to date by MoE that the Minister mentioned Better Start Literacy Programme and Ready to Read Phonics series were NOT specifically designed with dyslexic students in mind because that was not the remit MoE gave them. They contain some elements of SL but fall well short of what is needed to reach every child in every classroom. I encourage the Minister to keep engaging with Lifting Literacy Aotearoa and the flagship Structured Literacy schools which are already up and running with SL from Year 0 to Year 8 to see what a SL pedagogy looks like, the teacher PD, the resources, the lesson plans, the scope and sequence of what is taught and when and at what pace, the consistent data collection across all year groups, what tier 1,2&3 looks like etc. It's just plain crazy to say MoE want to keep Reading Recovery. If declining literacy rates are akin to a sinking ship then keeping Reading Recovery and a Balanced Literacy approach (albeit with slight lipstick on the pig modifications) is like saying to stop this ship from sinking "let's leave the large hole where all the water is getting in wide open". Structured Literacy is beneficial for all children whilst being essential for neuro diverse kids. We know this from the science and evidence. Now we know better, we have to do better. I realised in the 2020 lockdown that a balanced literacy approach had left my dyslexic 10 year old son not being able to read over 50% of 3 letter words correctly in an independent assessment. No one representing MoE can ever justify that to me or my son. Thankfully we found SL and can afford private tuition. It's been a long road undoing the damage the 3cueing/guessing system at the heart of balanced literacy has done to my son. What's happening to those kids who are slipping through the cracks that can't afford private tuition? MoE please just draw a line in the sand and move in the right direction instead of clinging onto the past. Structured Literacy is a complete shift away from Balanced Literacy and you cannot successfully, and should not try to, combine them." - parent



Appendix: The three cueing system

<https://tataiangitu.ac.nz/2021/03/25/getting-it-not-guessing-it-exploding-the-3-cues-in-reading/> Dr Christine Braid, Massey University

The key premise of the 3-cueing system is that successful reading involves using a combination of cue sources: sentence meaning, sentence structure, and the print on the page. Successful reading is positioned as bringing all these cue sources into action on a piece of text.



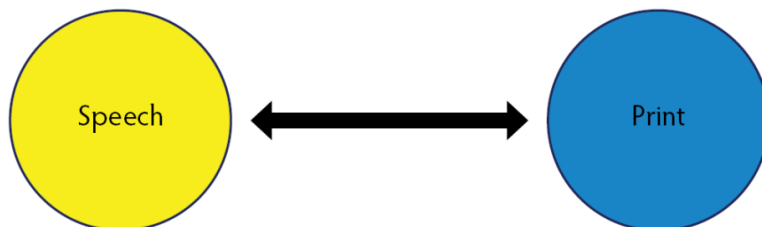
A diagram to show the 3-cueing system

The 3-cues model suggests that integration of all the cues is the ultimate aim. I ask us to consider that it is integration that is the problem. Cue integration allows, encourages, and directs learners to compensate for any lack of print skill by relying on other cue sources. While this may have a useful short-term effect, in that the student appears to read a sentence with success, it does not provide long term success. Long-term success comes from mastering the printed code. The mastery comes from close attention to words, all through the word, from the very start of learning to read. When a learner spends time not focused on the print (i.e., looking to the picture or thinking about what would sound right), they miss the opportunity to take the word patterns into long term storage, which is an absolute necessity for competency with print. In addition, children know they are “guessing it, not getting it” and their self-concept is negatively affected.

Addressing the 3 cues

In the 3-cues model, it is not clear what is required for success in the ‘visual’ cue or processing the print. We can look at other models to see that success with print (the visual

cue) involves two key processors in the brain (Adams, 1990; Seidenberg & McClelland, 1989). In the 3-cue diagram above, the one circle labelled 'visual' needs to be represented by two circles, as below, to show that processors of speech and print are involved in successfully reading the printed word. The change may seem minor, but this connection is **THE essential step** for becoming a competent reader. The connection between the printed word (its orthography) and the spoken word (its phonology) must be established and strengthened for reading to be successful. Some children establish the connection easily, while others need time and more explicit teaching.



The missing link in the visual (print) cue of the 3-cue model

Once a word is decoded, the reader can apply meaning and consider context. Successful readers process the print and then check with meaning and context, not the other way round.

Why does the 3 cueing system remain?

Many people think that the 3-cues model is backed by research, but this is not the case. The original study (Goodman, 1967) was flawed, never replicated, and subsequently shown to be inaccurate. Goodman suggested from his study that reading is superior within a context, rather than when words are in a list. However, experiments that attempted to repeat Goodman's original study found only poor readers had a major difference between reading words in a list and words in context (Nicholson, 2004). Good readers read words in and out of context. Poor readers read better within context and struggle without it.

Another reason the model remains is that the meaning cue has been conflated with gaining meaning from the reading process, or comprehension. In my research, I found that teachers could be hesitant to change away from an approach of integrating cues because they were

concerned that by using the print cue first, they were somehow downplaying the meaning of the text. But using meaning as a cue is not the same as comprehending a text.

A further reason for the continued use of 3-cueing is the use of predictable texts with natural language, rather than decodable texts when children are first learning to read. Teachers are reduced to directing children to use the picture cues (meaning) because in the predictable texts, the word patterns are too varied for an early reader to process.

In contrast, when we teach a child using a set progression, appropriate decodable texts, and change teaching to acknowledge a four-processor model, we can watch the child know they are “getting it not guessing it”. This transforms the child from reluctant to engaged. I have seen this transformation within one lesson.

The 3-cues model is too simplistic to be helpful and adherence to it has been disastrous for many learners.

Appendix: Ministry documentation on Reading Recovery Changes

<https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/System-of-support-incl.-PLD/Learner-initiated-supports/Reading-Recovery-and-Early-Literacy-Support>

Following the evaluation of Reading Recovery last year, we are enhancing Reading Recovery. Now known as Reading Recovery and Early Literacy Support, the programme provides a three-tier approach to supporting early literacy in schools that will enable a broader range of children to access literacy support.

- At Tier 1, Reading Recovery and Early Literacy Support teachers will be available to support class teachers with providing effective early literacy approaches to *all* learners, as well as contributing to the school-wide literacy strategy.
- Tier 2 support provides targeted group support for learners alongside peers supporting children who are not progressing in their literacy learning after their first term at school.
- Tier 3 support – 1:1 Reading Recovery – will support children still not progressing after a year at school until they are able to continue learning alongside their peers.

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Ready to Read Phonics Plus

At the same time, we will be providing enhanced Ready to Read Phonics Plus texts and supporting approaches. **These early readers will be incorporated into the foundational texts for Reading Recovery and Early Literacy Support.** They have been designed to advance children's ability to decode words and to gain meaning from text, and, along with support materials including a scope and sequence ("scope" is the breadth and depth of knowledge and skills to be taught; "sequence" provides the order of content and skills), will support teachers to use a **structured literacy approach** to teaching reading.

The Ministry is publishing these books, which have been developed with researchers at the University of Canterbury's Child and Wellbeing Research institute. They will be provided at no cost to schools in term 1, 2021, along with teacher support materials and online resources.

Reading Recovery training will be updated to incorporate the Ready to Read Phonics Plus resources and supporting approaches, to enable Reading Recovery teachers to work with small groups of children needing literacy support, as well as those requiring 1:1 support. Reading Recovery teachers will also receive guidance on how they can contribute to cross-school literacy strategies, so that more children benefit from their knowledge and expertise.

The evaluation of Reading Recovery in 2019 identified that it is an effective intervention for children involved in it. However, it is not effective in developing literacy capability and culture within schools.

The Ministry of Education provides staffing (271 FTTEs) to support the delivery of Reading Recovery nationally. The amount each region and school receives is based on roll size and learner need, using the equity index as an indicator of need.

Schools are expected to make a further contribution of FTTE.

It's expected that Reading Recovery and Early Literacy Support teachers will support learners across all three tiers, but it will be up to individual schools to determine the most effective balance to meet the needs of their learners.

Teachers in initial Reading Recovery (and Early Learning Support) training will focus on intensive 1:1 support and as they develop expertise will be trained to support small group teaching and contribute to across school literacy leadership.



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Level of support	Reading Recovery and Early Literacy Support	Reading Recovery and Early Literacy Support	Reading Recovery
Tier	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Type of support	Reading Recovery teachers support class teachers to provide effective early literacy approaches to all learners. Cross-school literacy strategies informed by Reading Recovery teachers.	Reading Recovery teachers work with children in small groups, using Ready to Read Phonics Plus approaches.	Reading Recovery teachers working 1:1 with children.
What's new/different	New offering	New offering	Using Ready to Read Phonics Plus approaches.
Who it's for	All learners within the school	Children not progressing in literacy after 1 term at school	Children not progressing in literacy after one year at school