



New Zealand
Literacy
Association

LITERACY FORUM NZ

Te Kōrero Pānui Tuhituhi o Aotearoa

BOOKS AND PIECES

WELL
READ
BOOKS AND PIECES

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Cover: *We love books from Raglan's
wee shop, Well Read. Steph Dix with
Pearl, Ava and Mila.*

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dr Kay Hancock
NZLA president

Nau mai, haere mai,

Welcome to the third edition for 2023 of *Te Kōrero Pānui Tuhituhi o Aotearoa - Literacy Forum NZ*, packed with exciting and enlightening professional reading. While this is the third issue of the year, it is also notable for many “firsts” – new president, new editors, and our first national conference since 2019!

I’m delighted to be writing my first message to you as NZLA President. Huge thanks to our Past President Sarah McCord for her leadership through the difficult Covid years and for the ongoing support and commitment of the NZLA executive.

I would like to extend a very warm welcome to our new *Forum* editors, Chris Thornley from Wellington and Kirsten Kean from Southland. This is the first time *Forum* has had two editors and we are loving the passion and dedication they bring.

At the time of writing this message, we are still basking in the glow of the 45th NZLA national conference “Lighting the Literacy Pathway”, hosted by the Southland Literacy Association. It was wonderful to see conference attendees making the most of the opportunity to learn, talk, and spend time with colleagues, celebrating

literacy in Aotearoa together. The dedicated and dynamic work of the conference committee, in particular Joyce Wakelin (who is also a member of our NZLA executive), created a new attendance record of 420 registrations! We congratulate the Southland council for their huge effort over the past three years, especially in the face of the challenge of not having any recent conference experiences to draw from.

At the conference, in another first, the NZLA executive had an exhibitor’s stand, providing information about NZLA and the regional councils and also highlighting the publication of a set of guiding principles that state our viewpoint about literacy and underpin the work we do. You can read more about these principles within this issue of *Forum*.

I would like to acknowledge the continued generosity of the Marie Clay Literacy Trust in providing awards to help NZLA members with conference attendance costs. Ten early career teachers and nine experienced teachers received awards to attend this year’s conference. Congratulations to all award winners.

Congratulations also to councils who were presented with Honour Council awards at the conference,

in particular Waikato Council who have attained Honour Council status for 20 consecutive years! These awards recognise and celebrate the achievements of regional councils. Other recipients this year were Manawatū, Tai Tokerau, and Southland.

In addition to the events run by regional councils, the NZLA executive are continuing to provide national webinars. Our most recent one was on October 19 with Sue McDowall talking about “How teachers who read create readers.”

The executive will also be running two one-day literacy symposiums in September 2024, one in Hamilton

and one in Christchurch, “Building resilient minds with critical literacy.” The keynote speakers are Drs Susan Sandretto and Aaron Wilson.

Keep up to date with national and local literacy events by visiting nzla.org.nz/events/national

Enjoy reading 2023’s third edition of *Literacy Forum NZ!* And look out for the first issue of *Forum* in 2024, which will feature articles from conference speakers and workshop presenters.

Ngā manaakitanga
Yours in literacy
Dr Kay Hancock
NZLA President

Write for us!

Literacy Forum NZ Te Kōrero Pānui Tuhituhi o Aotearoa
welcomes articles from all literacy educators.

The national journal of the [New Zealand Literacy Association](https://nzla.org.nz) (NZLA) is published three times each year and presents research, explores policies, classroom practices and children’s literature.

Please contact us editor@nzla.org.nz

FROM THE EDITORS



Kirsten Kean, *Editor*



Dr Chris Thornley, *Editor*

Kia ora koutou katoa

We are thrilled to introduce ourselves as the new editors of *Literacy Forum NZ: Te Kōrero Pānui Tuhituhi o Aotearoa*. It is a privilege to step into these roles and continue the discussion and knowledge-sharing of literacy in Aotearoa.

Chris: I come from Otautau, but have lived mainly in Otepoti Dunedin and now in Te Whanganui-a-Tara where I'm a member of the Wellington Literacy Association. Throughout my career I have been a teacher, post-graduate student, teacher educator, professional learning facilitator and researcher. Literacy and teacher professionalism have been my passion. In 2022, I retired from the Teaching Council Matatū Aotearoa where I was privileged to work around the country facilitating teachers' professional learning related to *Our Code Our Standards, Ngā Tikanga Matatika Ngā Paerewa*.

Kirsten: I am a HOD of English at a secondary school in Southland and the President of the Southland Literacy Association. I first became involved with the New Zealand Literacy Association through the Marie Clay Literacy Trust Early Years Award, which supported me to attend the 2019 conference in Christchurch.

Our thanks to outgoing editor, Stephanie Dix who over many months worked with the authors, collated articles, and then mentored us as we took up the editor reins through Vol. 38 No. 3. We have greatly appreciated your support, Steph.

We also thank the NZLA executive team who have provided valuable content for this issue.

In this issue, the New Zealand Literacy Association proudly announces the website publication (nzla.org.nz) of a set of guiding principles stating their position on literacy teaching and learning. You can read about the consultation process used in developing the principles and the broader contemporary and historical context that underpins them.

We bring you news of the 2023 Citation of Merit and Service Awards, the work of the International Development in Oceania Committee (IDOC) as well as reports from the regional literacy councils showcasing a range of literacy learning and celebration activity undertaken with teachers.

We also feature a series of articles related to the significance of children and young people gaining pleasure from reading. John Milne, Ruth Boyask and Jane Jackson have written specifically on this topic. As part of an ongoing project of work relating to Reading for Pleasure, they have advocated for its enhanced positioning in research and curriculum. The inclusion of references to Reading for Pleasure in recent Ministry of Education policy are heartening to them and makes their article especially relevant to current literacy conversations.

Helen Villers and Sue Bridges tell us about the amazing Storylines Story Tours. Authors and illustrators of children and young adult literature travel to schools and libraries across the country several times a year. The authors recount numerous tales of engagement between these visitors and their audiences who are experiencing a wealth of literature and gaining insight into an often unknown world.

In their literature review, Komal Kumar and Nicola Daly examine the possibility that children's literature can enhance the learning of priority learners. Without giving away the ending, we'd just say they find that, "Teachers' decisions about the literature they make available for their learners to read for pleasure, matters!"

On a different note, Helen Walls calls for a re-evaluation of the approaches used in teaching writing. Drawing on her own research and a range of other research literature, she builds her article towards three recommendations for policy and practice that she sees will change student achievement.

With much pleasure, NZLA pays tribute to the amazing contribution of Dame Lynley Dodd to children's literature. In an interview with Todd Burton she answers questions about how she develops her characters, how she overcomes challenges in her writing journey and whether she has received any surprising feedback from readers. There is much in this interview that teachers will be able to share with their classes.

Zac McCallum, Librarian at Halswell School in Christchurch reviews his picks of the best recent picture books from New Zealand authors and illustrators. It's great to be able to bring these to you in this issue when we have featured Reading for Pleasure articles.

Finally, we urge you to think about writing for this journal. You can decide whether you prefer to write about academic research, effective teacher practice, book reviews (academic or children's and young adults' literature) or literacy events. Check out the information on writing for *Literacy Forum NZ: Te Kōrero Pānui Tuhituhi o Aotearoa* on our website nzla.org.nz.

Ngā manaakitanga
Kirsten and Chris
NZLA Editors

New Zealand Literacy Association Guiding Principles

By **Dr Kay Hancock**

New Zealand Literacy Association (NZLA) is proud to announce the publication on our website (nzla.org.nz) of a set of guiding principles that state our viewpoint about literacy. It may seem strange that NZLA did not already have such a public statement. For many years NZLA has operated in an environment of widely shared understandings about literacy and literacy learning. More recently, however, we have seen the emergence of diverse views particularly in regard to literacy instruction in the early years of school. While this has created rich opportunities for professional dialogue and reflections on practice, it seemed timely for NZLA to articulate the guiding principles about literacy and literacy instruction upon which we operate.

These views draw strongly on Aotearoa New Zealand's unique history of literacy education, developed and enacted through interactions with government policy and practitioners. For many years, the school advisory service facilitated moderation and dissemination of ideas about effective practice, based not only on evidence from research, in particular the research of Dame Marie Clay but also on the collective classroom experience of generations of New Zealand teachers. Ministry of Education professional development projects such as Literacy Leadership and the Literacy Professional Development Programme continued to facilitate shared understandings and expectations about literacy and effective literacy instruction. Such projects plus Ministry-funded research publications such as the *Best Evidence Syntheses* and the ongoing inclusion of teachers and students in the development and trialling of the Ministry's instructional materials (student



Dr Kay Hancock,
President, NZLA 2023-25

Dr Kay Hancock is a literacy consultant and current president of the New Zealand Literacy Association. Kay specialises in the design and development of literacy materials and has a longstanding association with the *Ready to Read* series and *Junior Journal*. Her latest passion project is the Ministry of Education's *CHAPTERS* book series for year 3 students, designed to smooth the transition to reading chapter books and encourage reading for pleasure.

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texts and teacher support materials) has ensured ongoing relevance and effectiveness. The *Literacy Learning Progressions* (2010) was an especially significant publication in that it involved a nationwide consultation process in ascertaining the expectations for learners. Enduring principles of effective instruction have included the importance of oral language, of developing the desire to read, of equitable access to high-quality learning materials, and of teachers using a mix of instructional approaches to meet the diverse needs of their students.

In 2021 the NZLA executive began a process of consultation with representatives of regional councils about developing a set of guiding principles. Soon after this point, the first drafts of *Te Mātaiaho: The refreshed New Zealand Curriculum (Te Mātaiaho)* began to appear. We have been delighted to see the degree of alignment between our guiding principles and *Te Mātaiaho* and to what we have seen so far of the Common Practice Model (CPM). The CPM describes approaches and practices to support teaching and learning within *Te Mātaiaho*. Phase 1 of the CPM was released in March 2023 and Phase 2 will be released very soon.

The guiding principles are informed by New Zealand and international research, the Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA) Declaration, International Literacy Association (ILA) positions statements about literacy, Ministry of Education publications, and the expertise and practical experience of our NZLA members.

These are the guiding principles that have now been published on the NZLA website:

1. Literacy is the ability to use language to interpret, create, and communicate. Literacy is embedded in social and cultural practices and empowers people to live full and satisfying lives and contribute to society.
2. Language is the foundation for all thought and communication.
3. Literacy learning and teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand recognises Māori as tangata whenua and honours Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
4. Learning is most effective when teachers draw on and affirm learners' social and cultural identities and home literacy practices.
5. Every learner lives within a network of significant people in their community, whānau, and school. Sharing knowledge within these networks enables ako (reciprocal learning and teaching relationships).
6. Learners take different pathways to becoming literate. A teacher's knowledge of the learner underpins effective literacy practice.
7. Professional collaboration based on education science builds teacher expertise and enhances learner outcomes.

We expect these principles will be amended over time, perhaps on a 5-year review cycle or sooner, depending on changing priorities in literacy education and curriculum development.

The New Zealand Literacy Association wishes to thank all who have contributed ideas and provided guidance.

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This is a sample of the references used in developing the guiding principles.

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Sarah McCord

Kia ora koutou,
Ko Remutaka te pae maunga
Ko Te Awakairangi,
Hutt, te awa
No Koraunui Stokes Valley
ahau, engari
kei Bunnythorpe ki
Manawatū ahau e noho ana
Ko Sarah McCord toku ingoa.

Sarah is currently the past president of the NZLA. She has been a member of the Manawatū Literacy Association since 1996 and a member of the NZLA exec for over 7 years. Sarah is a primary school principal with a passion for all things literacy.

2023 Citation of Merit and Service Awards

By **Sarah McCord**

2023 Citation of Merit and Service Awards

This year the New Zealand Literacy Association (NZLA) Executive were delighted to award one [Citation of Merit](#) and four [Service Awards](#) to five very deserving recipients.

New Zealand Literacy Association Service Award honours those NZLA members who provide outstanding service to their local council. Service Award recipients must have been a member of their local council for at least 10 years and show leadership in supporting literacy development in their rohe.

New Zealand Literacy Association Citation of Merit Award is the highest national award conferred to an NZLA member. It recognises and honours those who have made an outstanding contribution to NZLA and literacy. This award also requires the recipient to have been actively involved in their local council for at least 10 years and show leadership in supporting literacy development. To be awarded a Citation of Merit recipients must have also been involved in the NZLA at a national level, this may include roles on the executive, publishing literacy papers, presenting at conferences, and supporting international literacy initiatives.

Special evenings were held in New Plymouth and Rotorua to present the 2023 awards to the recipients. NZLA executive members, local council committee members, family and friends attended these celebrations.

2023 Citation of Merit Award

Wendy Morgan

Waiariki Literacy Association

Wendy has been a valued member of the Bay of Plenty Reading Association (later renamed Waiariki Literacy Association) for over 20 years. Providing outstanding service locally and then nationally as a member of the New Zealand Literacy Association (NZLA) executive, Wendy also represented NZLA on the international scene as a member of the International Development in Oceania Committee (IDOC).

In her local association, Wendy held various leadership positions and was co-convenor for the NZLA conference in 2011. Furthermore, she was instrumental in facilitating the name change to Waiariki Literacy Association. As council delegate Wendy attended NZLA annual meetings for many years.

As a member of the national executive, Wendy was active, holding several

positions culminating in the role of President from 2012-2014. The decision to rename NZRA as the New Zealand Literacy Association had just been decided as Wendy became president and she was responsible for steering the implementation of this change within the organisation during 2013.

In addition to serving on the national executive, Wendy represented NZLA on the IDOC committee, taking on the role of secretary-treasurer. In 2015 she co-facilitated an Information Text Awareness writing workshop with educators in Fiji, supporting local teachers to write and illustrate information texts in their indigenous language.

The 2023 Citation of Merit Award recognises the significant contribution Wendy has made over the years as a passionate literacy educator. NZLA has certainly benefited from her leadership, commitment and friendship.

2023 Service Awards

Sharon Ross

Waiariki Literacy Association

The NZLA Service Award was presented to Sharon Ross in recognition of her significant contribution to literacy education at both the local and national level.

As a long-standing and invaluable member of the Waiariki Literacy Association, formerly Bay of Plenty Reading Association, Sharon held a

variety of roles and was a key team member hosting many local events and co-convening the NZLA conference in 2011. At the national level, Sharon was a member of the NZLA executive and held the role of President from 2006-2008. She also held the positions of NZLA secretary and treasurer and was involved in revamping financial and reporting systems. Her passion for literacy has inspired many people and we truly value her commitment and friendship.

Tricia Kenyon
Waiariki Literacy Association

The NZLA Service Award presented to Tricia Kenyon was in recognition of her significant commitment in supporting literacy education through her local council, Waiariki Literacy Association, and at the national level as Treasurer of NZLA from 2012-2019. Tricia was a member of WLA, formerly known as the Bay of Plenty Reading Association, for many years and was a member of the organising committee of the NZLA conference in 2011. While NZLA Treasurer, Tricia modernised the financial systems introducing XERO to enable more streamlined management systems. We have truly valued her expertise and commitment in this area.

Sally Morch
Taranaki Literacy Association

The NZLA would like to acknowledge Sally’s dedication, mahi and commitment to the NZLA, representing Wellington, Wairarapa and Taranaki Literacy Associations.

Sally was an active member and president of the Wellington Literacy Association – her leadership was instrumental in making the 2003 conference a success. She also founded the Wairarapa Literacy Association and is currently a member of the Taranaki Literacy Association: Sally has been a NZLA delegate for both associations. Sally was also an NZLA executive member and treasurer. She was an



Figure 1. Wendy Morgan (second from the right) with Tricia Kenyon, Past President Sarah McCord and Sharon Ross.

active member of the International Development in Oceania Committee from 2011-2015. Sally attended many NZLA conferences and coordinated the Books for Oceania stand. Her liaison with the exhibitors has been exemplary; this ensured that their participation was a positive and successful experience.

Jackie Cameron
Taranaki Literacy Association

The NZLA Service Award acknowledges Jackie's commitment, enthusiasm and mahi that she continues to bring to the Taranaki Literacy Association (TLA) and community. Jackie has been an active committee member since the early 1980s. As a former teacher and librarian, the TLA is very grateful for the support and expertise that Jackie brings to the committee. Her excellent coordination and communication skills have been instrumental in ensuring scheduled workshops were successful. Jackie's expertise and diligence ensured that reports and submitted articles for the Literacy Forum were on-time and professional. Furthermore, Jackie has sourced many books to donate and deliver to Books for Babies and local organisations over the years.



Figure 2. Jackie Cameron and Sally Morch

We at NZLA congratulate all of our 2023 recipients who have been actively involved in their rohe and right across the motu and beyond... for many, many years.

Ngā mi hi aroha ki a koutou!

Reading for Pleasure and Te Mātaiaho: *An opportunity not to be missed*

By **Dr John Milne**, **Dr Ruth Boyask** and **Dr Jayne Jackson**



John Milne

John is a Senior lecturer in the School of Education at Auckland University of Technology (AUT), New Zealand mostly working in initial teacher education. His research focuses on children's experience of their reading. He is currently involved in research projects investigating reading for pleasure in NZ that are providing the first real picture of reading for pleasure in this country. His own research interests relate to individual reading styles, and the self-regulation of reading comprehension.

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Ruth Boyask

Associate Professor Ruth Boyask's academic career has traversed five universities in three countries. Her work is driven by a desire to ensure socially critical research examines and informs public education, especially its systems of schooling. Boyask's research investigates and reconceptualises public education, examining how it prepares children to be part of the world. She convenes the reading research group at AUT, and has a particular interest in the affective and social dimensions of reading.

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Jayne Jackson

Jayne began her career in education as a primary teacher. She has taught across the primary years in NZ and in the USA and been involved in school leadership. Jayne has worked in Initial Teacher Education since 2007. Her Doctorate focused on working with parents to support struggling readers in ways which were compatible with home culture. This work continues to inform research in the field of literacy.

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Key words: *Reading for Pleasure, early years, Te Mātaiaho, curriculum refresh*

Introduction

As part of an ongoing project of work relating to reading for pleasure in New Zealand, we have argued for it to be given greater emphasis than it has in the past, both in terms of research and within national and school curricula (Boyask et al., 2022b; Milne et al., 2022). The inclusion of references to *Reading for Pleasure* (RFP) in the New Zealand Government's *Literacy & Communication and Maths Strategy* (Ministry of Education, 2022) released in 2022 was therefore pleasing. However, reading for pleasure was positioned as an at-home activity rather than something for which schools share responsibility, given much less coverage than the functional, technical aspects of literacy, and seemed to have a relatively low priority in the overall strategy. *Te Mātaiaho: The Refreshed New Zealand Curriculum, (Te Mātaiaho)* (Ministry of Education, 2023a) places RFP in a much more prominent position in classrooms. Our task now is to understand what this means for the teaching of reading, particularly in the early years.

New Zealand and international research (Boyask et al., 2021a; Boyask et al., 2021b; Boyask et al., 2022b; Boyask et al., 2022a) has identified the importance of RFP and its connection to a range of better outcomes for tamariki and rangatahi, both as individuals and as members of a wider community and society. It is therefore of concern that interest and engagement in RFP are declining (Hood & Hughson, 2022a; Horizon Research, 2021; Medina & McGregor, 2019). Engagement in RFP brings many benefits to individuals, such as better academic performance and positive wellbeing outcomes (Boyask et al., 2021b; Mak & Fancourt,

2020), and to society at large as those who engage in reading for pleasure are more positively connected to the rest of society (Wilhelm & Smith, 2016). Despite these benefits having been identified for some time, there has been little research relating to RFP in the New Zealand context (Boyask et al., 2022a), which is perhaps surprising given ongoing debates (Hood & Hughson, 2022b; McNaughton, 2020) surrounding literacy achievement. This lack may be due, in part at least, to a focus on the development of reading skills rather than on the development of students as part of a community or society of readers, as noted by Afflerbach (2022). This is something that has been apparent in recent years in New Zealand as well through the National Standards era and the more recent push from some quarters for structured literacy approaches (Boyask et al., 2022a). Consequently the taught curricula in schools have often become focused on skill development and test scores (Merga, 2016). Given that reading enjoyment and recreational reading are predictors of reading achievement (Tavsancil et al., 2019), more attention should be paid to RFP in Aotearoa.

Following the release of the *Literacy & Communication and Maths Strategy* (Ministry of Education, 2022a), later in 2022 the draft of *Te Mātaiaho* was released, and now we have the final version *Te Mātaiaho* and of the English learning area (Ministry of Education, 2023b). Within these documents there are much more explicit references to RFP than we have seen in New Zealand's curricula to date. The inclusion of RFP as a 'Big Idea,' the view of stories as a 'source of joy and nourishment,' and the inclusion of specific reference to reading for pleasure as a 'Practice' within the

'Do' strand in the English learning area in *Te Mātaiaho* is very pleasing.

Other developments within *Te Mātaiaho* have deeper implications relating to the inclusion of RFP. It connects to individual and group identity and engagement, and therefore to the refreshed purpose of the curriculum. Other aspects such as the key shifts (realising the intent of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, broadening our view of what success looks like, and high expectations for all), and the refreshed vision would also be supported by RFP. All these aspects require learners to be engaged with and enjoy their reading and learning if these aims are to be met. That means teachers will have to be mindful of what matters to ākonga and provide them with the opportunity to engage with texts and ideas that are significant to them. Doing so in the teaching of reading requires a broader understanding of reading development than the 'learn to read and then read to learn' view of reading instruction. Approaches that reflect a technical, reductionist view of reading result in learners having a perspective on reading that is focused on technical skill rather than the inherent value of reading (Cremin et al., 2014; Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018). Inclusion of RFP in the curriculum, particularly as something children need to be doing, means educators need a good understanding of what reading for pleasure is, how it is experienced by children, and what good, engaged readers look like. Without that, it will be hard for teachers to ensure that they are both promoting RFP and not unintentionally reducing its importance in the eyes of learners. The language used in the purpose statement and the

progress outcomes for English in *Te Mātaiaho* is reflective of a view of RFP as an active, social behaviour that has emerged in international research and more recently in New Zealand (Boyask et al., 2022b).

In our opinion then, *Te Mātaiaho* is a significant advance on the existing New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) document. The five big ideas contained within the English learning area and the subsequent contexts and practices constitute a much broader understanding of literacy, and reading, than its predecessor. A broader view such as this not only opens the door to considering reading for pleasure in schools, it also potentially provides a less divisive basis for discussions about the best approaches to teaching reading. We will need to consider not only how to develop proficiency in the technical aspects of reading and ways to promote enjoyment but also the potential impact of one approach on all aspects of reading. Neither promoting technical skill in a way that has a negative impact on enjoyment of reading, nor focusing on enjoyment to the detriment of technical skill will result in the development of well-rounded readers with an understanding of the value and benefits of reading. Early reading instruction needs to ensure both happen, so that technical skill is developed quickly, and that children will continue wanting to read in later years.

As a result, we need to consider the implications of *Te Mātaiaho* for teaching and learning in New Zealand schools. This is particularly important as the Ministry of Education continues its work in the development of a refreshed

curriculum and associated projects such as the development of a common practice model. The key purpose of this article is to applaud the inclusion of reading for pleasure in the refreshed curriculum and to outline some key considerations for the Ministry's continuing programme of work and for teachers. The broader conception of reading in *Te Mātaiaho* requires teachers (and subsequently learners) to have a broader understanding of what reading is than has previously been the case, and this means a different understanding of teaching practice. Our recent work with the Pūtoi Rito Communities of Readers initiative (Boyask et al., 2021a; Boyask et al., 2021b; Boyask et al., 2022; Harrington et al., 2021; Milne et al., 2022), using data from the Growing Up in New Zealand (GUiNZ) longitudinal study (Boyask et al., 2022) and an ongoing programme of research is beginning to provide a clearer picture of RFP in New Zealand. When placed alongside international research this provides a basis for thinking about what RFP is, and what conditions and learning experiences support its development and continued value for children and young people. Our ability to provide explicit guidance to teachers in New Zealand as to how they might best support RFP as the local evidence base is developing.

A more developed understanding of the nature of reading for pleasure

Our work challenges the historical view that reading for pleasure is a pastime for quiet, passive individuals reading alone (Cremin et al., 2014; McDonald et al., 2023; Wilhelm & Smith, 2016), viewing it as an active, social pursuit that is

supported when it is viewed in this way and becomes a visible, shared activity. From the beginning of schooling *Te Mātaiaho* requires children to be sharing their reading experiences with others and by the end of year 6 learners are explicitly expected to be members of communities of readers. This reflects the social nature of reading evident in our research (Boyask et al., 2022b; Milne et al., 2022) and the international research mentioned earlier. School leaders and teachers will therefore need to ensure sufficient time and priority is given to these activities (Harrington et al., 2021) and find ways to develop communities of readers and connect with existing communities in doing so. This is something that has not always happened in the recent past as the pressure to develop competent (but not necessarily motivated) readers has led to a technician approach and a focus on skill development (Boyask et al., 2022a; Fletcher, 2018).

Not only is reading for pleasure a social pastime, but those who take part in it are active, socially engaged people in other ways. Recent analysis of the GUiNZ data up to and including 8 years of age (Boyask et al., 2022b) investigated the lives of young children in New Zealand in relation to their enjoyment and frequency of reading outside the school environment. This study looked at the networks of relationships between RFP and other aspects of the children's lives including household members, schooling, and the activities they are engaged in. We identified a range of factors that were associated with RFP that begin to provide a clearer picture of how children engage with reading as a part of their daily lives, and this can help us begin to think

about how we can promote RFP as it is included in *Te Mātaiaho*.

A more developed depiction of readers

The relationships uncovered using the GUiNZ data have countered the prevailing perception of ‘readers’ as only being bookworms or quiet individuals sitting in the corner with a book. For example, children who were involved in organised and interest-based activities such as arts and sports were also more likely to read frequently outside school. While frequency of reading is clearly important and is likely to support reading competency through practice effects (Morgan & Fuchs, 2007; OECD, 2010), reading frequency and reading enjoyment are not the same thing. In this case however, these organised activities were also related to greater likelihood of enjoying reading. While those children less likely to be engaged in reading for enjoyment could also be active, they engaged in different forms of activity that were less goal-directed, such as free play. A similar pattern is seen in device usage. Children that did not engage in reading for pleasure did spend more time on their devices and importantly that time was more likely to be spent passively consuming media rather than an active engagement with online material as was the case with those that read for enjoyment more. The overall picture is one which supports a depiction of readers as people who are active and engaged with the world around them, one aspect of which is an enjoyment of reading.

We should not be surprised that readers have an active disposition. We have

known for some time that good readers are active and strategic in their reading behaviour and work to develop meaning and to understand (e.g. Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Studies that have looked at individual reading styles and dispositions have identified that good readers are less likely to have a reading style that is focused on decoding (Milne, 2021) and those that define good reading in terms of technical skill have a perspective on reading that is primarily focused on mastering the process of reading rather than the broader rewards offered by other perspectives (Kuzmičová et al., 2022). For this reason early instruction needs to develop technical proficiency quickly, not so that children can continue to focus on it but so that they don’t have to. As that technical proficiency develops, they must also develop the understanding that technical skill is not the end in itself, but rather a means to an end.

We are arguing for greater emphasis to be given to reading enjoyment here and have done so elsewhere (Boyask et al., 2022a) as well. However, we are not interested in engaging in the ongoing (and we believe distinctly unhelpful) debate between proponents of structured literacy or phonics-based approaches and whole language approaches. We argue for the need to explicitly consider both technical and enjoyment aspects of reading as both are necessary if the goal of literacy education is to produce young people who want to read, who choose to read, and find enjoyment through reading.

Being able to decode is obviously necessary and makes reading possible, and so teaching practice that utilises effective ways of developing this are

required. However, being able to read words, reading competently for meaning, and being motivated to read are not the same things. Focusing too much on skill to the detriment of pleasure and portraying reading as something engaged in by quiet passive individuals and not part of an active lifestyle may discourage many children from continuing to read as they grow. Reading for pleasure should be seen as a part of a full and active life.

If early reading instruction develops, maintains, and supports young children's enjoyment of reading then by the time they can read they will not only be capable of reading, they will want to do so because they see value in doing so, and find it enjoyable.

Instructional practice

As noted already, it is important to consider that if we (intentionally or otherwise) encourage a view of reading that is overly focused on accuracy and technical skill and does not pay sufficient attention to enjoyment then we may be working against the goal of developing readers who value and enjoy reading. Doing so would therefore limit individual and societal access to the benefits of reading for pleasure. Approaches that privilege technical proficiency and do not actively promote the enjoyment of reading for its own sake have exactly that effect and have been termed 'pedagogies of poverty' (Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018) as they are often employed where learners are facing challenges with reading, and yet have the effect of further alienating those children from the wider benefits of reading. It is true that some children will take longer than others to develop

technical proficiency, and it is important that enjoyment is maintained for those children while that takes place. It is here that we sound a note of caution in relation to *Te Mātaiaho* and the associated documents. The English learning area includes progress steps covering the first two years of schooling and these are all related to the deliberate use of strategies to decode text and to make sense of the ideas contained in text. While these things are all necessary for RFP, enjoyment or pleasure are not mentioned at all in the progress steps. Further, progress outcomes for literacy and communication for later years will be built into expected outcomes for other learning areas as *Te Mātaiaho* suggests literacy becomes about meeting the demands of those learning areas. If teaching becomes focused on meeting those progress steps and outcomes, then there is a risk that the RFP aspect of *Te Mātaiaho* becomes lost. Ways of working that promote RFP are volitional and active for the students involved (Cremin et al., 2014) which in itself promotes engagement and enjoyment, in contrast to the relatively teacher directed approaches used in specific skill development.

Given that readers are active and engaged people, pedagogies that reduce their ability to exercise their will are likely to work against a positive view of reading. With the inclusion of reading for pleasure in *Te Mātaiaho*, pedagogies of poverty and the disenchantment they produce will not develop learners that are able to meet the demands of the refreshed curriculum, potentially perpetuating current inequities in educational outcomes. Phase one of the Common Practice Model (Ministry of

Education, 2023c) identifies some key pedagogical approaches. Some of these, critical pedagogies and communicating pedagogies for example, promote the kinds of activities that we see in young people who engage in reading for pleasure. The concern in relation to reading for enjoyment and pedagogies of poverty within phase one of the Common Practice Model (Ministry of Education, 2023c) is a potential tension between the pedagogies in *Te Mātaiaho* and an intention to promote explicit teaching practices, particularly given the nature of the progress steps. The path toward pedagogies of poverty lies in those explicit teaching practices becoming too heavily focused on technical skill. As phase two of the Common Practice Model is developed and released later in 2023 (and subsequently interpreted by schools and teachers) it will be important that this risk is managed carefully and deliberately to ensure that both technical skill and a social enjoyment of reading are developed and maintained within the early years and throughout the schooling journey of young people. For this to happen, children must have repeated opportunities to engage with a wide range of rich texts that they can relate to, that have meaning for them, and that are enjoyable for them from the very beginning of their reading journey.

Conclusion

The opportunity provided by the explicit inclusion of reading for pleasure in *Te Mātaiaho* is one that should not be missed as it has been elsewhere (Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018). The nature of the current literacy progress steps and the inclusion of later outcomes in other learning areas

reflect a view of literacy development as 'learn to read and then read to learn'. To grasp the opportunity provided by *Te Mātaiaho* this alone will not be sufficient and we risk a continuation of some of the practices that have resulted in disengagement from reading. Children must enjoy reading and the social engagement that comes with that at the same time as they are developing the skills needed to read fluently. This needs to be considered as the Ministry of Education continues to develop the Common Practice Model. The inclusion of reading for pleasure should not be seen as a challenge to the teaching of reading skills, but as a necessary complement. If we want to improve the literacy of our tamariki and rangatahi it is vital that we are developing skilful readers who enjoy reading and will continue to value and engage in reading for pleasure. Doing so needs to be given equal importance and emphasis within reading programmes from the start of schooling. It cannot be left to chance or be seen solely as the responsibility of whānau and not a part of what we teach children at school. Not including enjoyment in reading programmes is teaching children that enjoyment is not important.

Once the spark of enjoyment has been extinguished, it is hard to reignite. It would be better if we did not need to.

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Storylines to the Rescue:

The case for exemplary Aotearoa New Zealand children's and young adult literature, story tours, and a read-aloud culture

By **Helen Villers** and **Sue Bridges**



Helen Villers

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Key words: *Storylines Story Tours, children's and young adult (YA) literature*

Introduction

In this article, we extrapolate key points from esteemed Emeritus Professor of Education Warwick Elley's recent article in this journal - see *Literacy Forum NZ: Te Kōrero Pānui Tuhituhi o Aotearoa*.

Elley (2023) argues for an approach to literacy teaching and learning where, as well as a focus on students' diagnosed strength and needs within the skills of reading, they are encouraged to engage in reading for pleasure. We describe, as such an example, Storylines Story

Tours, a programme designed to inspire and encourage students to read for pleasure and, by extension, for all other purposes as lifelong readers. Provided at no cost to participants, *Storylines Story Tours* take Aotearoa New Zealand authors and illustrators of *children's and young adult (YA) literature* into classrooms, school halls and libraries across the country up to eight times a year. We argue that the special nature of these story tours, through which children and young adults can see, hear and actively engage with 'live' authors and illustrators, enables vital exposure to the increasingly rich and diverse canon of children's and young people's literature in this country. Ngā Pou o te Whare Waituhi Tamariki o Aotearoa: The Storylines Children's Literature Charitable Trust of New Zealand, supports Elley's advocacy for reading aloud and independent reading in the expectation these approaches will engage our tamariki and rangitahi in an enduring love of reading and the likelihood overall literacy achievement and success across the wider curriculum may be enhanced.

Searching for the silver bullet

The complexity of sociocultural, linguistic, technological and economic factors affecting every aspect of people's lives in Aotearoa New Zealand has precipitated a quantifiable downward trend in student achievement in literacy, as measured by international comparisons and national evaluation and assessment data (May et al, 2018, McNaughton, 2020, Elley, 2023; Hood & Hughson, 2023).

It can be argued that these changes have had significant impact on those

affected by broader social justice and equity issues, as evidenced by the negative achievement and success data of students in our lower socioeconomic schools, and particularly those of Māori and Pasifika descent (May et al, 2018; McNaughton, 2020). Public and professional discussion typically leads to polarised debate, confusion and, almost inevitably, the pendulum swing of the literacy-related pedagogy.

Pendulum swings in literacy education

Given the diversity of children's strengths, needs and interests at school entry, it is inevitable that the pendulum of literacy pedagogy will impact variously on children learning to read and write. To complicate the challenges of literacy acquisition, success or failure occurs within an increasingly complex and competitive world in which teachers are pressured to adapt their pedagogy to meet the loudest professional, academic or political voices of the day. Snow (2023, June. para. 5) suggests that the goal of becoming literate should be "not to find who's right, but how to narrow the arc of those pendulum swings". Inevitably, this leaves some learners outside the reach of the arc. Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) extend the pendulum metaphor with reference to a spirit level, reminding us that irrespective of the theoretical and pedagogical turn, we are ethically bound to fairness and justice, equality and equity; and social justice for all the students in our professional care.

These issues are of particular relevance to the concerns that Elley (2023) raises. He draws critical attention to a range of shifts in literacy education, but

with a particular focus on the reading resources used at the beginning stages. He argues that a move to decodable instructional texts with their underpinning of a phonics-based approach means that the effort to create systematic letter-sound patterns might take “precedence over any telling of an interesting story. The results are seen in a frequent absence of good story development; a host of repetitive clumsy word sequences, for example, “Can Nan nap?” (Elley, 2023, p. 27). Elley holds that “...texts of this kind will do little to engage and motivate young children or to create their lifelong interest in reading” (2023, p. 27).

Responsible responses to irresponsible debate

A proliferation of recent media reports describing lower literacy achievement by students in this country has led to advocacy for a return to the ‘simple view’ (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) of reading, supported by a vast body of interdisciplinary research in literacy education, generalised as the *Science of Reading* (SoR). Claims are made that previous balanced approaches, where teachers encouraged meaning making through semantic, syntactic and visual/graphophonemic sources of information in text (Clay, 1998), and the ‘to/with/by’ approaches used to support the methodology, were somehow non-evidence based. Supporters of SoR argue that structured, phonics-based approaches are more likely to be the silver bullet for successful literacy acquisition. Extreme advocates of SoR have weaponised language, routinely using negative terms to apply to ‘balanced’ approaches, and defining it pejoratively as ‘a guessing

game’ lacking in formal reference to the characteristics, structures and features of words; this in an effort to debunk and dismiss an extensive and widely-respected research base, built over decades, and used effectively by informed literacy practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand (Clay, 1998; McNaughton, 2020).

Warwick Elley draws on his own extensive research and data analysis (1992, 1994, 2023) to reflect on the nature and impact of this debate on the state of literacy education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Elley (2023) critiques what he views as the narrow focus of the research base informing the theoretical and pedagogical turn in established classroom routines and SoR reading resources. He argues that the changes made on the basis of this research (Chapman et al, 2018) may misrepresent practices long regarded as evidence-based and effective literacy teaching and learning. Elley is sceptical of the exclusive support the Ministry of Education has given to phonics-based methodology. He is clearly disappointed that the range of processes, strategies and resources involved in the ‘to/with/by’ approaches of the last several decades are increasingly being replaced, at the emergent and early stages of reading instruction at least, by “...a Structured Approach which emphasises, at the outset, the learning of letter-sound links, and an awareness of phonemes, graphemes and phonological knowledge for beginning students” (Elley, 2023, p. 21). Elley is concerned that the *Phonics Plus* decodable options, recently been made available within the Ministry of Education’s *Ready to Read* series of instructional readers

(instructional.series.tki.org.govt.nz) may compromise young children's motivation and engagement in the early stages of learning to read. While these texts have been designed to complement the authentic, story-based and high-interest texts on the colour wheel, familiar to most teachers of beginning readers, Elley questions Ministry of Education decisions to change from a balanced approach to a structured phonics-based methodology. This latter approach, he opines, is based on flawed evidence, marginalising children whose school-based challenges in learning are likely to occur "outside the school gate" (Elley, 2023, p. 31); and has its roots in a historical melee of political decision making from *Tomorrow's Schools* (Picot, 1988) to the current university-based model of teacher education. Elley reflects on the halcyon days of New Zealand literacy education some thirty years ago, and in particular the professional development initiative that saw teachers involved in nationwide group-based professional development, adopting approaches such as language experience, shared and guided reading and writing, sustained silent reading; all designed to develop phonological awareness, vocabulary and language structures in context, and pivotally, to be extended by teachers reading aloud to children using quality children's and young adult (YA) literature. Elley believes the current advocacy for a heavily weighted structured, or phonics-based approach to literacy teaching and learning, "contrasts with our traditional *Balanced Approach* which exposes students at the outset, to an immersion in high-interest, illustrated books" (Elley, 2023, p. 22). Science advisor to the Prime Minister, Stuart McNaughton, argues similarly for "reading with

children Years 1-3; shared (or dialogic) reading; guided instructional reading with systematic phonics; shared and instructional writing; personalised high-quality dialogue; and home reading and writing" (2020, p. 2). While *Storylines* is heartened by this informed support for reading aloud, and the commitment to quality literature and reading for pleasure, at school and at home, we remain concerned about the wider theoretical pedagogical principles and practices underpinning effective literacy teaching and learning.

Where to from here?

From Elley's discussion (2023), Snow's concerns (2023, June, para. 5) and McNaughton's (2020) advice to government, emerges a clear commitment to *real* text; quality literature used as the foundation of a classroom programme to be shared, guided, used independently and, importantly for the focus of this article, used as 'read alouds' for the sheer joy of story; for developing not just the skills listed above but metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness, knowledge building, empathy, cultural respect, social justice and equity. Well-selected read-aloud texts, be they instructional readers, picture books, novels, fiction or non-fiction, will serve educational purposes across the curriculum. This is clearly underlined in the draft *Te Mātaiaho: the refreshed New Zealand curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2023) as a 'DO' action within the English learning area, where *Reading for Pleasure* is to be made explicit and to be understood as a big idea that "Stories are a source of joy and nourishment" (2023, p. 4).

Who chooses the books? And on what basis?

Providing the impetus for a literature-based culture in the classroom, and indeed across a school community, can be challenging for school leaders, teachers, and the community where there may be myriad barriers to creative and inspiring immersion in children's and YA literature (Ministry of Education, 2023, p. 5). Herein lies the opportunity, and doubtless some difficulty at times, for teachers to meet instructional as well as the aesthetic pleasures when selecting books. The challenge is to find books that enhance learning, motivate a desire to read, and that speak to our ākonga in voices that are familiar yet extending: books that call the reader to action in a student-centred, diversity-inclusive and Te Tiriti-honouring way. Teachers need confidence to make decisions based on knowledge of the literature that will 'make the difference'; although this is a tired adage it is a critical professional responsibility.

Te Mātaiaho, proposes that literature selected by teachers will consider a set of criteria. Books selected will:

- reflect the identities and cultures of ākonga
- provide windows into different places, times, and cultures
- use and mix different modes (e.g., visual storytelling, tukutuku patterns, and graphic novels)
- include enough depth and length to allow for in-depth exploration over time
- demonstrate sufficient complexity and literary merit to allow learners to build their understanding

In addition, and importantly, teachers will 'use their insights to advocate articulately and persuasively for equity and sustainability and to contribute to resolving collective global challenges' (p. 32).

We are all aware of the relative paucity of books reflecting the lives and language of our ākonga, especially Māori and Pasifika students, at all levels, in all genres, and in the translation of home languages. Consideration must be made for the legions of students from other lands, languages and cultures; we need to take account of the diaspora and displaced. Thus, the question remains: How do we serve the interests of all?

Is the breadth of the home-grown canon of literature currently sufficient to meet (at least in the first instance) the rich and complex demands of our wide curriculum and the needs of all our students? Of course not, but we do believe that books created by Aotearoa New Zealand authors and illustrators, for students in Aotearoa New Zealand, are a priority and a special taonga. This serves two key purposes; firstly, the opportunity for the literary 'mirror' (the reflection of who we are; who we have been in the past and might be in the future), and secondly the growth of a prosperous home-grown (and accessible) writing, illustrating and publication community. That is not to forget the 'window' on the world and the wider canon our ākonga need to be part of as we all work together to explore and find solutions to the problems of being human in the mid twenty-first century.

In *Te Mātaiaho* (2023) we read that:

“Creativity and imagination transport us to new worlds... Enjoying the stories of others and crafting our own provide us with opportunities to experience different worlds through creativity, imagination, and interaction” (p. 32).

Books may no longer look like or sound like the ones adults were raised with, but they must engage and complement, or even compete with, the wide-ranging affordances of the digital world. Thus, teachers must keep abreast of contemporary text, in all its forms, to ensure this wider notion of truly ‘balanced’ literacy, as well as the ‘science’ of literacy, is being delivered to ensure joyful, engaged, skilled readers who will make lifelong choices to be readers and writers in whatever form, affordance or genre they please.

So, who might help us make these critical day-to-day choices of the books that will permit student engagement, achievement and success? The teachers’ (and whānau) helpmates here are undoubtedly librarians, be they affiliated to school or public libraries, or to the invaluable service provided by the National Library Services to Schools team. Libraries and librarians are vitally important, so it is disheartening to read and to hear of the demise of so many school libraries in favour of technology and extra classroom space (Little, 2023).

Booksellers and publishers too have a role to play, in making selections of texts visible, attractive and accessible to children and young adults. National book awards and festivals assist in developing a reading culture and

several charitable organisations exist to promote the pleasures of reading. Storylines, we argue, is a force of strength that ‘punches above its weight’ in this latter category.

Storylines to the Rescue

Storylines (www.storylines.org.nz), consistent with Elley’s viewpoint, believes in the importance of stories in supporting our children and YA become truly literate. Storylines offers a powerful way to ensure that Aotearoa New Zealand’s children’s and young adult literature holds and retains a pivotal and foundational place in the hearts and minds of our tamariki and rangitahi. One aim of Storylines is to provide a raft of opportunities which connect teachers and children with books, through rewarding and extending literary experiences with authors and illustrators, storytellers and dramatists - who champion the pleasure and possibilities inherent in the stories of our places and our people.

Storylines as an organisation is deeply involved in spotlighting and promoting the power and importance of good children’s and young adult literature. We have a deep commitment to New Zealand picture books, non-fiction, junior fiction, and young adult novels as well as original works in te reo Māori, bilingual books, and translations. Storylines, while not directly involved in classroom literacy pedagogy, is familiar with the range of literacy theories, approaches and strategies, cognisant that each, in and for specific contexts and purposes, is critical to literacy success. *Storylines’* particular focus, however, is on children’s and YA literature in the classroom for reading

aloud, independent reading, and for wide curriculum access and connection.

Storylines values reflect twenty-plus years of advocacy for quality Aotearoa New Zealand children's and YA literature. Teachers, parents, authors, illustrators, librarians, publishers and booksellers involved with Storylines are committed to quality literature for children and young adults, in all its manifestations (whatever the approaches to teaching and learning), as summarised on the Storylines website:

“Storylines promotes awareness of the importance of reading and books for all children and young adults; works to ensure children and young adults in New Zealand have access to high quality literature; and supports the writers and illustrators of literature for children and young adults in New Zealand. We aim to inspire children, young adults and their whānau to enjoy the magic of books and reading, especially reading books created for them by New Zealand writers and illustrators” (www.storylines.org.nz, 2023).

Book stars on tour – they rock!

Through the highly popular Story Tours across the motu/country, Storylines endeavours to set in motion the motivation and resources that students and their teachers may require to ignite the aesthetic- and knowledge-based joy of books. This occurs through active engagement by the very people who write or illustrate them.

Seven times a year, a minibus packed with four well-known and respected Aotearoa/New Zealand authors and illustrators, brings the joy of story to students, their teachers and their whānau, in their own schools and communities, and free of charge. And such is the depth of our writers and illustrator community, these are different people each tour. This is the stuff of dreams for our ākonga who (as we know from nearly six years of experience) fully engage with real-life experts who share their life stories as writers, readers and illustrators. The ākonga are so often transfixed when they realise the person reading a book aloud to them actually wrote it or illustrated it! For many children, the school visit of an author or an illustrator becomes a celebrity event and their reading and writing lives may well be changed forever.

Becoming an author or an illustrator

Authors and illustrators, sharing their work on a Story Tour, can be hugely inspirational. Many students leave a session beginning to believe that they too could be writers or illustrators. How do we know? Because they tell the Story Tour presenters, and they tell each other.

Evidence of student numbers, anecdotal stories, and feedback from more than thirty face to face and digital Story Tours over the past five years, indicate that thousands of students from early childhood centres to upper levels of secondary schooling have engaged with the touring writers and illustrators. Many students have expressed an interest in writing and becoming

writers. Teachers, support staff and librarians too, as well as other members of the school community in several schools, have wanted to know what to read, how to write and where to get published. Of note is the considerable interest in the visual arts. Students are often highly involved when working with our illustrators. Some with artistic ambition are encouraged by the career opportunities they see within children's and YA literature.

One 16-year-old boy in a remote East Coast secondary school loved poetry and identified himself as a poet. When asked how he saw his future, he shrugged and stated he would be leaving school to shear sheep and farm, like the rest of his whānau. As it happened, a farmer-poet, Tim Saunders from Manawatu, had recently had his work showcased in the media. The Storylines team was able to show him the farmer's literary work and discuss his potential road to publication. The young man was visibly moved.

This anecdote reflects an important aim of Storylines; that is to nurture the development of literature in Aotearoa New Zealand by supporting aspiring authors and illustrators and acknowledging and promoting high-quality literature for young people published in Aotearoa. Building on this anecdotal example, and for the many others like him, it is important to point to the Storylines Manuscript Awards (www.storylines.org.nz/awards) as well as the Story Tours. What a wonderful opportunity it would be for this young man to enter the Storylines Janice Marriot Mentoring Award, or to work towards being published in te reo Māori via the Storylines Te Kahurangi Katerina

Te Heikoko Mataira Award. Perhaps a picture book for the Storylines Joy Cowley Award, or even a junior fiction book for the Storylines Tom Fitzgibbon Award would be preferred. Maybe this young man has a YA novel in his head and heart, and if this were the case then there is the Storylines Tessa Duder Award for young adult fiction. And the Storylines Gavin Bishop Award for illustration provides another route for visual text, should that be a special skill and interest. Experience suggests this award creates particular interest for older students in the secondary schools we visit.

Evidence of students' creative thinking as a result of their engagement with authors and illustrators, is frequently apparent in their questions and responses. A group of younger students, engaging with two touring authors, listened avidly to a contemporary retelling of *Te Ika a Maui*. "How could the motu have been drawn up by Maui's hook?" they pondered. Their questions led to a highly entertaining introduction to physics for over a hundred children. "How come you can skim stones then? Does the energy come out of them?" The teachers present in the room were similarly interested in the discussion.

Younger children frequently contribute in disarming ways when encountering a real live author for the first time; "Have you ever thought about going to New York and making it big?" "How did the lighthouse princess get there in the first place?" "How many pencils get broken when you write?"

A teacher at a Story Tour school, who had previously been published was keen to promote a manuscript she had

submitted for the Storylines Tessa Duder Award. She told the Story Tour team she now had another text underway and was 'bravely' testing it out with her own secondary level students.

A writer and storyteller abandoned his preparation for a Story Tour session in a small school recently when he saw the perilous state of the school's flagpole. Instead, he related a wildly humorous story based on his own childhood, demonstrating with real impact how everyone has something to write about, and something to be read and enjoyed by others.

The Story Tours are free and available to all schools in Aotearoa, and the awards are open to every aspiring writer and illustrator. Both the story tours and the awards may provide a gateway to achievement at school, and possibly even highly successful careers. It could be argued that our body of quality Aotearoa children's and YA literature is built upon such opportunity. Of note for teachers and librarians is the chance to refresh their knowledge and enthusiasm as the new curriculum requirements are bedded into classroom literacy pedagogy.

Making an impact

The impact on teachers and students of a Story Tour or other Storylines events on teachers and students cannot be underestimated. If, through them, we are able to convince even just one person (and we know from feedback that there are actually many) to read or to write or to illustrate then we are on the way to meet Elley's (2023) advocacy for a rich, book-based, learner-centred approach to literacy success for all.

Storylines strongly endorses the power of teachers and parents reading aloud to young people (of all ages) and extending a book in multiple ways – building new concepts and ideas, vocabulary and concepts, developing world knowledge and curiosity about the unknown, be it reality or fantasy. While Storylines embraces digital texts in all their affordances, it advocates firstly for face-to-face connection. Sharing a book with an individual or a group can be startling in its impact.

In order to promote high-quality literature for our young people in Aotearoa New Zealand, the Storylines Notable Books are announced each year. Books are forwarded by New Zealand publishers in several categories; picture books, junior fiction, non-fiction, young adult fiction and books in te reo Māori and translation. Books in te reo Māori can be submitted in any of the previous categories. Storylines carefully appoints panels of judges comprising librarians, teachers, authors and academics who select up to ten books that are considered 'notable' within each category. These are then promoted by libraries and booksellers across the country, thus creating a reliable and inspiring canon of home-grown literature for our tamariki and rangitahi.

Storylines also offers readers and aspiring writers and illustrators a range of literary opportunities such as writer workshops, panel discussions, awards events, author or illustrator talks and a monthly newsletter ensuring members have up-to-date reviews. The website provides Top Ten Tips; the Notable Book lists; and much more. Every couple of years Storylines hosts a Writers' Hui where writers, illustrators, agents,

publishers and booksellers come together in conference, and to pitch new ideas for the betterment of the children's and YA 'scene' in this country.

In recent years, funds have been made available for the purchase of books in the home languages of our refugee children and young people. Another initiative is the Storylines collaboration with *What Now*, the ubiquitous children's television programme.

Membership of the Friends of Storylines Ngā Pou o Te Whare Waituhi Tamariki of Aotearoa has several categories for individuals, families, schools, organisations and international subscribers. Membership provides access to a range of subscriber benefits, including the awards. However, in keeping with our values and intent, the *Story Tours* do not require membership. This is part of our commitment to nationwide access for all.

Getting on board with a Storylines Tour

Storylines takes Story Tours into seven different regions each year, and with a different team chosen each time for the combination of their various text types. Schools wanting to receive a Storylines Tour visit should check on the Storylines website (www.storylines.org.nz) to see if their school's region is identified for visits in the current or following year, as well as how and when to apply for a visit.

Conclusions

We concur with Elley's (2023) view that when learning to read and write, there are few substitutes for the pleasure of being read to. There is, he argues, no surer way to becoming literate than drawing on emerging ideas about how books work and what they tell us about the world. Reading aloud is a springboard to hearing and recording sounds in words, building vocabulary, becoming grammatically competent and working strategically and critically to comprehend, all in order to become real readers and writers.

Storylines acknowledges the importance of the phonemic awareness and phonological processes involved in learning to read, but our focus is to argue ardently for the power of reading aloud, both fiction and nonfiction, in context and with purpose, enabling teachers to respond to learning needs, interests and content in creative, imaginative and extending ways.

As Snow (2023, June, para. 5) reminds us that the fight over a singular correct approach to teaching literacy could result in the worst-case situation where "Kids get really bored and never read for fun, and don't understand how much fun it can be to get lost in a book."

A commitment to reading aloud and children's and YA literature in general does not contradict the efforts of teachers who engage with a structured phonics approach in the early years, but it does invite teachers and children back into the quiet space, where story

becomes, once again, a significant part of the interactive literacy and language programme. *Te Mātaiaho* (2023) reflects this return to ‘joy’; issuing an explicit request to engage ākongā in the pleasure of reading for reading’s sake; an official edict not seen since a similar statement in the English Curriculum document of 1994 (Ministry of Education, 1994).

Given Elley’s compelling reflections about what he sees as a fading read-aloud tradition in our schools, the *Storylines* commitment to making books, authors and illustrators available to children and young people right across the country may have quite a bit to do with literacy teaching and learning after all. As Elley points out,

“...when we engage children in making books, building identities as authors, we help them notice and think about the decisions their favourite authors make – authors they come to think of as peers. It’s much harder to do that with books like *Dan Can Fan the Man*” (Elley, 2023, p.27).

Just imagine how powerful a commitment from all stakeholders in literacy to champion high-quality

Aotearoa New Zealand children’s and young adult literature (whether to be read-aloud, shared, guided and/or used independently) might be. There is even a possibility that if the material is chosen wisely, achievement levels may rise, the inequitable gap between those who succeed and those who don’t might narrow, and classrooms and libraries might once again become the pivotal hubs of our communities. This depends on policy and practice; funding; management; teacher education; and a deep commitment to our ākongā and their families.

Another important step in future will be for *Storylines* to undertake more formal research to establish the efficacy and outcomes of the *Story Tours*. *Storylines* may be just one (important) component of such a complex undertaking, but we remain committed to policies and practices to ensure the pendulum settles in a place where books are guaranteed to provide the balance when the spirit level is used to measure the outcomes. While we must move forward, scientifically *and* with balance in mind, the last and most sensible word must go to Warwick Elley (2023, p.31) “We must preserve the best in our literacy policies.”

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How Can Children's Literature Be Used To Lift Literacy Learning Among Priority Learners in Primary Schools?

A literature review

By **Komal Kumar** and **Nicola Daly**



Komal Kumar

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Nicola Daly

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Key words: *Children's literature, priority learners, minority group, primary school*

Introduction

As a classroom teacher (Komal), my daily reading programme typically involves small group reading sessions focussed on explicit phonics teaching

and developing decoding strategies to read independently. Alongside small group reading sessions and whole class shared book sessions, children also have the opportunity to independently select books from the class library.

This is a collection of books and magazines within the classroom for children to explore before the transition into the next subject area. In my experience, during this time, there are some children who are deeply engrossed in the *children's literature* available to them in the classroom; but unfortunately, there are also children who are less engaged, some reluctant to even pick up a book. After talking to one student in particular, who was struggling with his literacy learning, I realised that along with his lack of confidence to read independently, he also felt like the books in class were boring and didn't look like him or his family. This student's perception of reading was similar to many reluctant readers I have taught. It raised my interest in wanting to understand what the research says about how we can use children's literature to lift literacy learning among priority learners.

Positioning myself as an educator

I am a New Zealand born Indian with strong roots in the island of Fiji. I have seven years teaching experience in Aotearoa New Zealand. English is my third language and I have experienced difficulties in feeling misrepresented growing up within this education system. My identity is made up of those before me. My grandparents set sail from India more than 80 years ago to the island of Fiji, where my parents were born and brought up. They packed up their lives and migrated to Aotearoa New Zealand hoping to give my two sisters and me, a better chance at life. It is here that my schooling experience began.

Growing up in a New Zealand educational setting, I often felt like the books I read in class did not reflect my identity; my language, culture and family traditions seemed to disappear when I walked into class each day. I was often described as a reluctant or shy reader in class; however, in contrast to this, my motivation, interest and confidence as a reader began to flourish when I connected with the books I read.

My motivation for exploring how we can use children's literature to lift children's literacy learning among priority learners stems from my childhood experiences along with my professional experience as a *primary school* teacher in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Priority learners

According to the Ministry of Education (MOE), *priority learners* are the lowest performing school students who historically underachieve compared to the rest of their cohort (Education Review Office [ERO], 2012). The term minority group is also used to describe children who are not from the dominant culture and who have been consistently underachieving compared to the dominant cultural groups (Bishop et al., 2014, Quigan et al., 2021). It is important to note that priority learners and minority group are not the same group. Within an Aotearoa New Zealand context, Māori (tangata whenua as indigenous people), Pasifika and emergent bilingual children are overrepresented within the priority learner group (ERO, 2013). It is suggested that schools need specific instructional approaches by teachers and whole school systems put in place in order to accelerate literacy achievement for

priority learners in primary and high school settings (Bishop et al., 2014; ERO, 2013; Quigan et al., 2021).

Context: Literacy performance in Aotearoa New Zealand schools

One of the key issues within the current education climate is the steady decline in literacy performance in reading and writing both nationally and internationally. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an international organisation of 30 countries that identify trends, similarities, and differences between global education systems by using a set of indicators that can be compared across countries (Education Counts, 2022). According to the OECD, literacy performance refers to the way in which learners develop confidence to comprehend and reflect on texts to deepen knowledge, achieve goals, and use new understandings to participate in society (OECD, 2022). OECD figures suggest there is an inequity between high and low achieving students in Aotearoa New Zealand (Bishop et al., 2014; ERO, 2012) which raises concerns about the long-term effects for those priority learners who are consistently underachieving.

Inequity between high achieving and low achieving students

Research from internationally standardised tests such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) have repeatedly concluded that Aotearoa New Zealand children have

steadily dropped in literacy performance compared to other countries since 2001 and additionally, results from these tests show that children from minority groups and children from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to underachieve in literacy compared to the rest of their peers (Chapman et al., 2015; Cummins, 1996; King, 2003; Tumner et al., 2008). This raises concerns about the serious impact on students' future opportunities if actions are not taken to address this consistent drop in literacy performance within the current education system.

Underachievement of Māori and Pasifika learners

One of the key issues present within the Aotearoa New Zealand education sector is the persistent underachievement of some learners in literacy, in particular, Māori, Pasifika and emerging bi-lingual students (ERO, 2012). It is concerning that many of the current literacy education issues that directly impact priority learners have been historical problems that continue to be present within the current education system. One of the first official documents reporting the discrepancy between high and low achievers in Aotearoa New Zealand education was in 1960. The Hunn report identified the ongoing ramifications of persistent educational underachievement impacting the future of Māori children relating to education, housing, and health (King, 2003). Whilst many Māori and Pasifika learners are successful in their literacy learning, it is of serious concern that this achievement gap is still very much present in the current education climate and continues to impact Māori and Pasifika priority learners in particular. As educators,

we must consider how our own classroom environments and selection of literature can play a role in lifting educational outcomes for students. This literature review aims to explore and critically analyse national and international research to examine how children's literature can be used to lift literacy learning among priority learners.

Children's access to literature in classroom libraries

As mentioned above, PIRLS is an international research study conducted every 5 years. This study is designed to measure and compare the reading achievement and views of Year 5 primary school children across 50 OECD countries. The PIRLS 2016 New Zealand achievement study involved 5646 children from 188 schools across the country. The children were typically around 10 years of age and in their fifth year of primary schooling which is an important transition point in reading acquisition (MoE, 2017).

The PIRLS 2016 New Zealand's achievement study also explored trends in children's access to literature in classroom libraries compared to other OECD countries (Chamberlain, 2019). A questionnaire was conducted where approximately 390 teachers were asked about their classroom environment and the accessibility of literature for children to enjoy in classroom libraries. Teachers were also asked about the types of books displayed and details on how the children accessed these materials in the classroom (Chamberlain, 2019). The data in Figure 1 displays the results from this questionnaire. Whilst Aotearoa New Zealand recorded one of

the highest percentages (97%) that were likely to have classroom libraries, when teachers were asked about the variety of books within classrooms, the data showed that these classrooms displayed fewer books and magazines in classroom libraries compared to other OECD countries. This is concerning because in trying to use children's literature to improve literacy learning for priority learners, having access to a variety of books and magazines to engage and connect to learners is crucial (Davie, 2006).

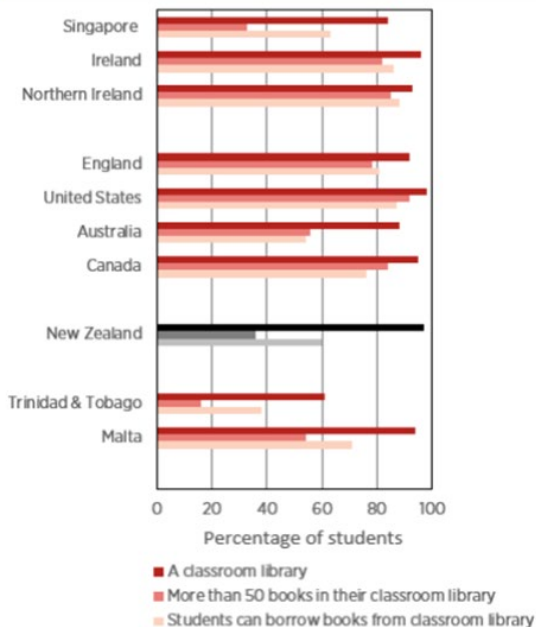
The data from this study highlights that in 2016, only 36% of Year 5 teachers had classroom libraries with more than 50 books available for students to read. Furthermore, opportunities to borrow books from the classroom were less common compared to other OECD countries. According to Chamberlain (2019), "Students who have relatively easy access to reading material, through either a school or class library, will have more opportunity to read for enjoyment as well as for intended purposes such as reading required to meet curriculum goals" (p. 29). For many students, school is the main environment where they can access books (MoE, 2003) therefore, educators must consider the accessibility to children's literature in classrooms.

In addition to there being limitations with access to books in the classroom, there is also a potential limitation with regard to diversity within classroom collections. In my (Komar) experience, students who have been identified as priority learners within the classroom have often struggled with finding literature that represents their lives in some way, whether it be

through language, culture, or similar family structures. Many of the priority learners I have taught have preferred to engage in literacy board games or apps which in my opinion, is at least partly due to being unable to find a book that interested them enough to read. Bishop and Berryman (2006) explain when students do not have access to books that link to their interests or world views, they are less likely to engage with the learning and therefore, are more likely to withdraw from participating in class which implies that having access

to a variety of children’s books within classrooms could help to encourage participation and engagement in literacy learning. It appears likely that literacy learning could be improved when children have regular access to a variety of books at school which are reflective of their world experiences.

After reviewing articles based on improving literacy outcomes for children within Aotearoa New Zealand and around the world, three core themes emerged, exploring how educators



Notes:

Countries are ordered by their students’ mean reading achievement (see Figure c.1 in Appendix C). The three grey shadings for New Zealand correspond to the red shadings shown for the other countries (e.g. mid grey corresponds to a class with more than 50 books).

Source: Exhibit 9.4 in Mullis, et al. (2017).

Figure 1: Number of Books (and Magazines), Classroom Access to Literature (Chamberlain, 2019, p. 29).

could improve literacy learning for those priority learners who were making less progress in literacy compared to dominant cultural groups. These are

- inequitable representation of ethnic groups in society in children’s literature,
- improving teacher’s own knowledge of authors and regularly sharing books in class from a variety of authors, and
- student voice and community voice in the selection of books read.

It should be noted that the majority of journal articles which explore how children’s literature can be used to lift literacy learning comes from international rather than our own Aotearoa New Zealand context.

Inequitable representation of ethnic groups in society and in children’s literature

The literature indicates that one of the most crucial factors in improving literacy learning for priority learners is the connection between children’s cultural backgrounds and that being authentically reflected in the books they read (Centre for Literacy in Primary Education [CLPE], 2020; de Bruijn et al., 2020; Zygmunt et al., 2015). The literature suggests that when children are not being authentically represented in the books they read, this can heavily impact a child’s connection, motivation, and interest in reading which can impact their success in acquiring literacy knowledge (Davie, 2006; CLPE, 2020; Janks, 2012). The CLPE, (2020) is a United Kingdom (UK) organisation that advocates for the fair representation of all students within children’s literature

in order to ensure every child feels connected and reflected in the books they read. The Reflecting Realities survey conducted by CLPE reviewed children’s books published between 2017-2019 in the UK aimed at children ages 3-11 years. In 2019, 6478 books were submitted, and publishers took part in this survey by submitting their literature (fiction and non-fiction) for a rigorous review process to determine the number of children’s books that represented Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups. The survey showed that between 2017-2019 only 7% of children’s literature featured characters of Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background (CLPE, 2020). To put this into perspective, out of the 6478 books that were published within the UK in 2019, only 680 of these books featured characters from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic groups. In summary, the CLPE survey results concluded:

“If you are a literate child who reads for pleasure then this has more impact on your future life chances than any other factor. Encouraging reading for pleasure is a social justice issue. But we also know that learning to read is a social process, to be successful you need to connect with your reading material, you need to be able to see yourself, in some way, in what you read. The under-representation of Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic characters means that readers from a range of backgrounds do not always have the opportunity to make those connections.”
(CLPE, 2020, p.3)

The lack of children’s literature that reflects the demography of classrooms within the UK has been an ongoing

issue which has raised concerns over the quality of literature that is being presented to children within schools (CLPE, 2020). According to the CLPE (2020) survey, children's literature published in the UK in 2019 did not adequately represent the population of readers within the UK. Therefore, there were a significant number of learners who were not being given the opportunities to make connections with the texts available, in particular, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background children.

The CLPE survey also highlighted that between 2017-2019, the small number of minority ethnic group characters that were presented in children's literature were background characters with less prominent roles within the narrative compared to the number of main characters representing dominant cultural groups. To date there is no research published concerning diversity in the children's literature of Aotearoa New Zealand, although there is some in preparation. However, this UK research highlights that there is still a significant number of children who are not being authentically reflected in the texts they read. Therefore as educators, it is crucial that we consider how the literature within classrooms reflects our students and what we can do to ensure that students feel authentically represented in the schools.

The lack of published children's literature available that authentically represents Black, Asian and minority ethnic group children in the UK has a direct impact on the literature that children have access to within Aotearoa New Zealand. According to Broomhall et al., (2017) and Reynolds

(2011), children's literature in the 19th century was predominantly marketed towards parents as a way to imprint traditional societal views and Christian morals on children to prepare them for adulthood. Publishing companies began to mass produce literature as the industry had become a highly profitable area. Currently, some of the biggest publishing companies are within the UK and United States of America (USA) (Broomhall et al., 2017; Reynolds 2011) and therefore, it is likely that much of the literature available in classrooms here are published by larger publishing companies overseas that produce English language literature which may not necessarily reflect our children. Whilst there is a growing publisher awareness of producing children's literature related to Aotearoa New Zealand, these books still constitute a small percentage of those available in classrooms here. As a result, educators must consider how they can ensure that children have fair access to literature that is relevant, authentic and representative of their lives because as mentioned above, connection to literature is one of the core contributing factors to success in literacy. Reference to collections such as the *New Zealand Picturebook Collection* (picturebooks.co.nz) and the *New Zealand Pacific Picturebook Collection* (pacificpicturebooks.co.nz) (Daly & McKoy, 2013), as well as a more recent survey of picturebooks featuring Pacific communities (Foe, Kelly-Ware & Daly, 2021; 2022) can assist in locating picturebooks which reflect a diversity of identities specific to this country.

Jesson and Parr (2017) conducted a study exploring teachers' selection

of children's literature for Pasifika students in New Zealand over two years. This study involved 11 primary school teachers from Years 1-6 across 10 schools who had participated in the Pasifika Literacy Professional Development Project aiming to address educational underachievement of priority learners and lift educational outcomes for students, in particular, Pasifika students (Si'ilata et al., 2012). The teachers were selected based on their class achievement data which demonstrated that Pasifika students were performing well above the national average in reading or writing in standardised tests. Teachers participated in focus groups aimed at identifying how teachers can effectively select literature to engage priority learners in literacy learning. Specific features of the text were explored such as illustrations, content, and variety of authors. All teachers agreed that when there was a connection between home and school, children were more likely to be engaged in learning tasks as the children felt represented in the texts they read.

Whilst this was a small study, it was still significant because this study suggested that student's literacy performance excelled when they felt authentically reflected in the texts they read (Si'ilata et al., 2012). The teachers involved in this study identified specific features of texts that they considered before selecting books for their learners and this study implies that teachers' selection of children's literature may have played a role in the successful performance of Pasifika learners in standardised tests. This study concluded that extensive knowledge of children's worlds and using texts that connect to children's lives could be an

effective strategy to optimise literacy learning in the classroom. Within my classroom context, I have noticed that when students felt connected to the texts read in class, they were more likely to contribute to the conversation and engage in the learning intentions for the lesson.

The research thus far indicates that there is a need for teachers to select literature that reflects the world views and cultural backgrounds of learners; however, the research also suggests that minority groups are still underrepresented in children's literature compared to dominant cultural ethnic groups both globally and nationally. Therefore, educators must consider features of text and explore children's literature to identify books that may authentically reflect the day to day lives of their learners.

Authenticity of authors and text

The second theme identified in the literature concerning how children's literature can support priority learners was through recognition of authentic texts and understanding how to identify literature that relates to children's world views.

The way in which literature is represented to an audience plays a pivotal role in the authenticity of texts read within the classroom. According to Daly, (2017), and Davie, (2006) one of the ways in which educators can help to lift literacy learning is when students feel seen and heard in the texts they read. Authenticity of text can be achieved when the authors and writers of literature have a personal connection

to the cultural concepts, language and perspectives that the literature presents (Bishop et al., 2014; Daly, 2017; Davie, 2006; Zygmunt, 2015). Davie (2006) explored how features of children's books can provide implicit and explicit messages to the intended audience and how messages can be modified to suit dominant cultural groups. Davie (2006) uses the term 'indigenous gaze' to describe how literature can be altered to suit the world views of dominant western groups. Davie's study (2006) analysed two indigenous authored books and explored how knowledge of these text features are crucial in developing teacher's knowledge of children's literature when selecting books for children. Davie concluded that teachers could facilitate literacy learning by acknowledging and finding books that represent student's cultural background, language repertoire and lived experiences so that children enter into school feeling empowered and through their life experiences. An example of this would be teachers would need to recognise that a student who may enter school under refugee status will have an entirely different worldview and life experiences to a child born in Aotearoa New Zealand (Arizpe, 2019; Davie, 2006).

One of the ways in which educators can explore authentic literature is through the use of para-textual information (Davie, 2006). Davie (2006) points out that educators must develop a critical awareness of what constitutes authenticity of a text, because that can be altered through the design process and through editing that presents a book in the way that appeals to westernised world views. The design process and editing can blur the

narrative of many minority groups by changing the intended message and altering the voices of minority groups (Davie, 2006). Along with authentic literature providing opportunities for minority group children to feel represented within the classroom, it is also important to note that effective text selection within the classroom also provides the entire class with opportunities to develop empathy and an understanding of different world views and perspectives and, as a result, provides opportunities for educators to facilitate and unpack social issues that children may not experience or have opportunities to discuss out of school. Daly (2020) and Korteeg et al. (2010) suggest that children's literature can be used as a tool to facilitate these discussions and help students to gain insight into other people's lived experiences.

Davie (2006) points out that text features such as the blurb, acknowledgements and illustrations can provide detailed cues to understand the intended audience of the literature. This can be used to ensure literature is selected that may reflect children's similar lived world experiences in a way that ensures the voices and narrative of the author are protected and valued. Consideration of para-textual information when selecting literature for the classroom will support educators in choosing authentic children's books which provide a platform for children to connect to literature and provide opportunities for students from minority groups to feel seen and heard through the authentic narratives portrayed in the literature used within classrooms.

As educators, having an awareness of authors and illustrators' backgrounds and lived experiences can help create connections between children and the books that are read in class (Davie, 2006). This can be achieved when educators develop their knowledge of children's literature and continue to explore ways they can bring a variety of books into the classroom to share with learners. The connections or familiarity a child might feel to the messages portrayed in authentically represented literature could in turn, help to lift literacy learning.

The literature thus far, points out that educators play a crucial role in providing children with multiple opportunities to read books that reflect children's world views in the classroom (Daly, 2017). One possibility for how teachers can engage priority learners in literacy learning could be to understand paratextual information that provided details on the intended audience of books (Davie, 2006). Having a broad knowledge of authors both nationally and internationally also provides children with opportunities to see and hear personal stories from authors who may reflect similar life experiences as students within the classroom and this could in turn, encourage priority learners to feel connected to the literature they read in class and engage with literacy learning by sharing their own personal experiences with their peers.

Student voice and community voice in the selection of books read

The third theme concerns how children's literature can support priority

learners through the engagement of student and community voice. Several researchers have suggested that the inclusion of student and community voices in the selection of children's literature can improve reading outcomes for those children most at risk of underachieving. This builds the link between teachers, schools and the cultural world views of children and their families (Bishop et al., 2014; Bishop & Berryman., 2006; Zygmunt et al., 2015). These researchers are of the view that the genuine partnership between educators and the inclusion of community voices in relation to their children's literacy learning can improve student engagement and connection to the books read in class.

Zygmunt et al. (2015) designed and implemented a project called Books Like Me which aimed to address ways in which schools can improve educational outcomes for priority learners in reading in the USA. This community immersion research project explored ways in which the use of culturally relevant literature could play a role in lifting educational outcomes for African American students. Teacher education candidates engaged members of an African American community to take part in the selection process of authentic African American children's literature that could be introduced within the classroom to engage students and also provide authentic representations of African American culture for all students. A database was used to select high quality African American literature that was further scrutinised by assessing the para-textual information such as the title or relevance to the intended audience. The teaching candidates selected 61 books for members of the

community to read during a literacy event aimed at engaging members of the community to hear their voice and world views. During this event, 20 community members reviewed literature that they felt was purposeful and meaningful to use within the classroom. Many of these community members were parents of children in nearby schools, adults who worked within the school reception, and recognised community elders who had rich cultural worldviews to share. Along with the literacy event which provided community members with the chance to share their views on the children's literature, semi structured interviews were conducted with the aim of capturing the authentic voices of these members. One community member explained:

The books about hair reminded me of what hair still means to African American women—what women go through in trying to love their hair and love themselves. I didn't know that there were books like this for children. I had never seen them before and didn't grow up with those types of books, of course. It was nice to know that the authors of those particular books would consider how important these books could be to children. This topic was something we could all relate to. (Zygmunt et al., 2015, p. 29)

The community members displayed a high level of interest in student's literacy education and many members emphasised how powerful it was to view authentic representation of African American people. This was not just through illustrations but through accurate representation of historical events that impacted this community and generations of African American

people highlighting the perseverance, integrity and determination of the people (Zygmunt et al., 2015).

Similarly, Tripp (2020) highlighted the need to consider a range of literature that best supports priority learners within the classroom and the messages that the literature portrayed in representing these groups. For example, whilst literature that details the reality of the Black Civil Rights movement and the struggles that many African American people had to endure should be discussed and unpacked in facilitated conversations within the classroom, it is also important to note that it is not ideal for children to only see themselves portrayed through traumatic historical events. Educators must consider how this can impact minority groups in the way that they view themselves if all they are seeing is one particular moment of history (Tripp, 2020).

The community members who participated in the Books Like Me project expressed an appreciation for the range of literature that captured many shared memories of childhood experiences evoking emotion and nostalgia by providing a glimpse into the personal and collective histories whilst maintaining integrity and ownership of the writer's lived experiences. Many community members also recognised that children's literature could be used as a tool to capture oral histories that had been passed down through generations in a way that connects with children through books. Zygmunt et al. (2015) highlighted that many of the teaching candidates who had organised the community event reported feeling privileged to be able

to gain a deeper understanding of the world views and authentic experiences of these community groups. Their responses suggested that they felt that the project helped to strengthen the connection between communities, homes and school, creating opportunities to open up discussion and dialogue of cultural experiences that may not otherwise occur (Zygmunt et al., 2015).

Conclusion

This literature review explored how children's literature can be used to lift literacy learning among priority learners in the primary schools of Aotearoa New Zealand. The literature outlined three key themes that considered how teachers could use children's literature to help students, in particular priority learners, to connect with the books they read and in turn lift literacy learning outcomes in the classroom.

The first key theme was the inequitable representation of ethnic groups in society and in children's literature. The underrepresentation of minority characters in children's literature means that some learners may not have equitable opportunities to make connections with the characters in the books they read (de Bruijn et al., 2020; CLPE, 2020; Zygmunt et al., 2015). The literature suggests that the intentional selection of children's literature that is reflective of the increasingly diverse demographic of students here may help children to connect with the books they read in class and therefore, be more willing to engage in literacy learning.

The second key theme was recognising the authenticity of authors and

text. Developing an understanding of text features such as blurbs, acknowledgements and illustrations can help teachers to select literature that preserves the voices of authors and provides narratives of authentic lived experiences (Bishop et al., 2014; Davie, 2006; Daly, 2017; Zygmunt, 2015). Providing children, in particular priority learners, with books that preserve the authentic voices of authors can connect the children with these books and may help them to engage with literacy learning and share their own experiences with their peers (Davie, 2006).

The final theme in this literature review was the engagement of student and community voice when selecting books for children to read. The connection between teachers, school environments and families play a crucial role in engaging learners and building positive associations with literacy learning (Bishop et al., 2014; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Zygmunt et al., 2015).

The literature reviewed suggests that teachers need to:

- recognise that there may be inequitable representation of ethnic groups in the literature that children have access to, and consider ways in which they can critically examine how books may or may not authentically represent the demographic of the classroom,
- improve their knowledge of children's books and authors and explore a range of literature that may not always be widely publicised by big publishing companies,
- develop the skills in assessing authenticity of books through the

- use of paratextual information,
- consider ways in which schools can build positive relationships and encourage student and community voice in engaging students in literacy learning.

This literature review has identified some ways in which educators may lift literacy outcomes for priority learners. Whilst there is a need for

local research concerning authentic representations of diversity in children's books here, and further empirical research to explore how diverse literature improves literacy outcomes for priority learners, the research thus far provides an insight into some of the ways in which educators can continue to develop their understandings of children's literature and improve literacy outcomes for priority learners.

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Writing Instruction: *It's time for change*

By **Helen Walls**

Introduction

Learning to write is essential to success in education and beyond (Sedita, 2023). At school, writing enhances learning across the curriculum, improving recall and comprehension, word reading, and reading fluency. In the world of work, it is estimated that writing skills are required in over 70% of salaried jobs (Graham & Hebert, 2010).

Given the importance of writing in many aspects of life, low rates of student achievement in New Zealand are cause for concern. Data from the National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement, conducted in 2018, indicate that 63% of students in Year 4 were achieving at the expected curriculum level, and just 35% of students in Year 8 (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2021). More recently, in the Ministry's pilot of new NCEA literacy standards, just 34.5% of the Year 10 students passed writing. Most concerning, just 2% of Decile 1 students passed the writing standard (Evaluation Associates, 2022). This, despite the commitment of New Zealand teachers, who – as I am reminded of during my daily work in schools – are dedicated professionals, always striving to achieve the best possible outcomes for their students.

Clearly, there is an urgent need to re-evaluate approaches for teaching writing, and to identify new methods that work. The approaches of primary school teachers are of particular interest, as it is during these early years of schooling that

foundational writing skills are taught. So, what has been the ‘status quo’ in writing instruction in New Zealand primary schools? And which methods have led to such poor results?

As is widely recognised in the research literature, the constructivist-oriented Whole Language movement - founded by Kenneth Goodman - has been influential on the curricula of many countries since the 1970s (Goodman, 1993; Patel, 2010; Tunmer & Chapman, 2015). It has been particularly influential in New Zealand. Goodman himself described our school system as, “progressive [and] child-centred” and “receptive to a view of reading as holistic and meaning-seeking” (1992, p. 194). For the teaching of writing, Whole Language advocates have recommended Process Writing, a set of methods developed on the premise that learning to write occurs somewhat ‘naturally’ – like speech. Teaching handbooks (for example, Graves, 2003) emphasise the importance of student motivation to write, and recommend student choice of topic and the use of students’ personal experiences as inspiration for writing. They de-emphasise the importance of explicit teaching and the teaching of technical skills such as handwriting and spelling. Instead, teachers are advised to support a ‘free-flow’ drafting process, with conventions of correctness considered only in the final stages, and teachers advised to ignore poor handwriting or a messy page (Graves, 2003).

Significantly, these Process Writing recommendations were founded in anecdotal and not empirical research

(Goodman, 1992). Despite this, the theories have informed advice given to New Zealand teachers by the Ministry of Education, exemplified in the Ministry’s teaching resources, *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1-4* (ELP) (MOE, 2003), and *Teaching Writing in Years 1-3* (MOE, 2012). While both these resources were first published some time ago, they remain prominent on the TKI website. *Effective Literacy Practice* (ELP) was also provided free to all teachers in hard copy, and has been described by the Ministry as a ‘core professional text’ (see Patel, p. 52). While certain other Ministry documents demonstrate greater commitment to the science of writing – including *Sound Sense* (MOE, 2018) and *Teaching Handwriting* (MOE, 1987) neither of these titles deals specifically with written composition, and *Teaching Handwriting* is difficult to access on TKI, with no direct link from the Literacy Online page.¹

In the following review I consider the Ministry’s commitment to Process Writing approaches, referring frequently to *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1-4* (ELP) (MOE, 2003), and *Teaching Writing in Years 1-8* (MOE, 2012), to provide examples. I re-evaluate much of the advice provided in these handbooks, in the light of empirical research findings. I then suggest alternative, evidence-based methods – likely to help raise achievement in our schools. As both publications continue to be promoted, a critique is prescient.² It is my hope that such a discussion will alert educators and policy makers to the need for change in teaching priorities and practices.

Teachers' Beliefs and Practices for the Teaching of Writing in Aotearoa

The question arises as to the impact of the Ministry's messaging, on the beliefs and practices of New Zealand teachers. Anecdotally, it seems that many teachers now reject Process Writing in its purest form, though my own study of primary teachers' beliefs and practices (conducted in 2018) points to the ongoing influence of such methods (Walls & Johnston, 2023).

This study included two stages. The first was a survey of 626 teachers on their beliefs and practices for the teaching of writing. The data were examined using a principal components analysis (PCA). This is a statistical procedure whereby all data can be compared to establish covariance, or a relationship between data points. We used the PCA to investigate the relationship between survey items – to see which items tended to be endorsed together, by the same survey respondents. From our analysis, three constructs, or belief systems, emerged. These included a set of items which demonstrated commitment to 'explicit teaching,' another set which demonstrated the valuation of 'process writing' approaches, and a set which demonstrated the valuation of 'socio-cultural' approaches. Significantly, most process writing survey items were favoured by at least 70% of survey respondents, including (for example) the items: Instead of telling students how to spell words, teachers should encourage them to spell as best they can; Students' writing skills develop by sharing their work with peers; and, Students' engagement in the

writing process is more important than the quality of the written work they produce. In addition, 98% of teachers agreed with the statement: Students should have frequent opportunities to write about their personal experiences.³

In a second stage of the study, a subsample of 21 teachers supplied writing samples from the students in their classes, at two time points, reflecting progress made over two school terms. The samples were marked using an analytic rubric, so that we could then consider which beliefs and practices were associated with greater rates of student progress. Notably, only the explicit teaching dimension had a positive and statistically significant correlation with progress. In addition, the two individual items with the strongest positive correlations were: I explicitly teach spelling (correlated at .61) and I explicitly teach handwriting (correlated at .60).⁴

Another earlier study provides further insight into the philosophical orientations and practices of New Zealand teachers. Parr and Jesson (2015) surveyed 118 teachers on their teaching priorities and practices and found that survey respondents placed the least emphasis on teaching spelling through rules and patterns, and teaching strategies for spelling unknown words. The authors comment on this "relatively minor emphasis on teaching basic skills" (p. 1008) compared to the findings of other international studies.

The Science of Writing

Given that current methods are failing many students, what research should we consult in order to identify more

effective approaches? Empirical research applies the scientific method to reduce the influence of bias, therefore providing more reliable information for educators and policy-makers. This body of research has informed the seminal, 'Simple View of Writing' (Berninger, Graham, Vaughan, Abbott, Begay, Coleman, Curtin, & Hawkins, 2002), a model of writing development which identifies three sets of sub skills necessary for success. These include (i) *translation*, which means turning one's thoughts into words and sentences, and which requires knowledge of vocabulary and sentence structure; (ii) *transcription*, which means physically getting one's thoughts onto the page, using handwriting, spelling, and typing; and (iii) *executive function*, which means being an intentional and self-aware writer, able to manage all of the demands of a writing task, including content knowledge, knowledge of conventions, and the processes of planning, re-reading, evaluating, editing, and revising. Significantly, the writing processes do not follow one another in a linear fashion but interact recursively throughout composition (a good writer will be reading, checking, evaluating and revising from their very first sentence) so that writing might best be described as 'a juggling act' (Flower & Hayes, p. 31, 1981).

The significance of working memory is underscored in the Simple View model - as most of the demands of writing must be managed within this memory system. Working memory is used in all new learning and problem-solving situations. It could be thought of as the brain's 'desktop,' or 'the contents of consciousness.' It is extremely limited in its capacity, particularly

for children. This means that if the technical basics (such as letter formation) have not been practised to automaticity, these will likely occupy all of working memory and prevent the student from attending to other aspects such as the ideas they wish to express (Brann, 2001; Cowan, 2010).

Three key changes to raise student achievement

What are the implications of the empirical research, for classroom teachers? And what changes must we make, in New Zealand classrooms, to redress the achievement crisis we find ourselves in? In what follows, I describe three flawed approaches that have been promulgated by Process Writing advocates and by the New Zealand Ministry of Education. For each of these, I suggest new methods to replace them. Specifically, my recommendations are:

(i) That teachers rely less on personal experiences as motivation for writing and instead have students write on a variety of topics, and for a variety of purposes.

(ii) That, instead of assuming that handwriting and spelling will develop through immersion in meaningful writing tasks, we make the explicit teaching of these skills an utmost priority - especially in the junior years.

(iii) That we revise conceptions of the writing process as 'staged', and instead encourage students to re-read, check, and revise, at the sentence level. And that, to further support this reading and checking, we explicitly teach sentence structure, using sentence combining.

Recommendation One:

Rely less on personal experiences as motivation for writing. Instead, have students write on a variety of topics, and for a variety of purposes.

Graves and other Process Writing theorists (see Calkins, 1986; Murray, 1973) told teachers that personal experiences are the best inspiration for writing. This advice is reflected in *ELP*, in which teachers are told that texts are engaging when they, “relate to children’s interests [and] draw on and affirm their social and cultural identities” (p. 15), and that, “students need opportunities to write simply and honestly about their own experiences” (p. 109). While the authors of *ELP* do acknowledge that students should engage with, “different kinds of texts” (p. 114) and other Ministry documents also support this view (see, for example, *The Literacy Learning Progressions*, which includes writing exemplars on non-fiction topics, for example, Egyptian temples and the lifecycle of a butterfly), the overall emphasis in *ELP* is on personal experience writing. And (as already discussed in the introduction) my survey data suggest that many New Zealand teachers remain committed to this kind of writing.⁵

Despite its high valuation by the Ministry and by teachers, empirical research suggests that personal experience writing is not optimal for writing development, for four main reasons:

First, because with personal experience writing there can be a lack of clarity around one’s purpose and audience. This makes the writing task less motivating and does not support the

development of critical, executive function skills. As briefly outlined in the introduction, executive function for writing means having a clear understanding of one’s purpose, and being intentional and self-aware throughout the writing process, constantly evaluating the developing text in line with this purpose. Meaningful, or authentic writing tasks, such as ‘to write a survival story to entertain one’s classmates,’ or ‘to write a guide to the native trees on our grounds, for visitors to the school’ will support this intentional process more than the weekend recount will – as the students will engage with more interesting content, and with a real reader in mind (McCutcheon, 1988).⁶

Second, because personal experience writing often leads (by default) to a recount structure. This, in turn, results in students practising a relatively unsophisticated process of ‘remember and write’, and producing uninteresting, list-like compositions (such as, “...We went to the pools. Then we went to Denny’s. Then we went to my aunty’s house. It was fun...”). So, this is another way in which personal experience writing fails to support the intentional decision-making that student writers need to practise (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1981).

A related point is that, if personal experience writing is used as motivation too frequently in a writing programme, students will not gain sufficient knowledge and experience with writing for the different genres and text structures required at secondary level, including narratives, informational reports, and persuasive essays (Graham et al., 2012).

Finally, we must consider the impacts of personal experience writing on the development of vocabulary knowledge, which is essential to success in both writing and reading (see Biemiller, 2012). If students are always writing about what they already know, how will their vocabulary knowledge be extended? (See Wexler, 2020, for an in-depth discussion on the importance of a knowledge-rich programme).

So, instead of relying too much on personal experiences as motivation, teachers should ensure that students have opportunities to write on a range of topics and for a range of purposes (Graham & Harris, 1997). Teach the conventions of genre and style so that students will become confident writing for any purpose which is required (Graham et al., 2012). For non-fiction topics, integrate writing with other curriculum areas so that students have some familiarity with the knowledge before writing about it. Writing about new knowledge will benefit writing development, but also academic development more generally because writing will help to secure relevant concepts and words in long term memory, much more so than simply reading or talking about the concepts would (Nation, 2019).

Recommendation Two:

Prioritise transcription skills in the early years, and teach them explicitly, every day.

Theorists such as Graves de-emphasised the importance of teaching handwriting and spelling, telling teachers to instead prioritise the expressive aspects of writing. This message has been

promulgated by the New Zealand Ministry of Education. For example, in *ELP*, writing is defined as “a creative act, *not* a set of quantifiable skills to be taught in sequence” (p. 136, italics added). The ‘not’ in this statement is misleading as it suggests a false opposition between technical skills and creativity in writing, whereas writing is *both* creative *and* technical. In addition, certain technical skills must be taught well and early to allow students to focus on its more creative aspects.

A lack of emphasis on the teaching of spelling and handwriting is notable throughout both handbooks. Although *ELP* numbers 200 pages, just five are dedicated to the teaching of spelling. On one of these, teachers are advised that “The writer’s main aim is to convey meaning. Too much concentration on accurate spelling [...] can reduce the focus on conveying a meaningful message” (p. 147).

With regards to handwriting, just two paragraphs are dedicated to the teaching of this skill. One of these paragraphs reads: “Students’ handwriting develops in the course of their experiences with writing [...]. Initially, a teacher needs to accept some irregularities, especially when an undue emphasis on letter formation could interrupt a young writer’s flow of thought” (p. 148). And so, teachers are effectively discouraged from having students practise correct spelling in writing, and from teaching correct letter formation.

Teaching Writing in Years 1-3 (MOE, 2012) contains just two paragraphs for the teaching of spelling (see page 13), with handwriting mentioned once on

page 18 (“teach letter formation during handwriting”). No further advice is included regarding the why, what or how, except for the suggestion that teachers might laminate handwriting cards for practice – advice which is problematic because, when students practise letter formation independently, teachers have no way of knowing whether they are practising correct formation or embedding confusions.

In my opinion, another flawed recommendation (in the 2012 publication) is that “children should write from their first day at school” (p. 3). While this may be a reasonable expectation for children who come to school well prepared, for others, it could be counterproductive. Imagine the experience of a student who has limited knowledge of phoneme-grapheme correspondences and who is not yet able to form letters easily, when asked to write a sentence. It is likely that they will feel anxious or frustrated. In addition, as they attempt to write without sufficient knowledge and skill, they may practise and reinforce confusions. So instead of having children write from their first day, it is prudent to wait until they have enough knowledge and skill to make the process meaningful – and not too much of a struggle.

These messages regarding transcription, from Process Writing advocates and from our Ministry of Education, are demonstrably unscientific. Numerous empirical studies have shown that if spelling and handwriting are not mastered, they will occupy all of a student’s working memory and make it impossible for them to focus on anything else, including the ideas

they wish to express (Berninger et al., 1997). Spelling and handwriting are together labelled ‘transcription’ in the Simple View model – where they are represented as one cornerstone of writing development (Berninger et al., 2012).

To first consider handwriting: Jones and Christensen (1999) assessed 114 Year 1 students and demonstrated that handwriting ability accounted for 67% of the variance in their writing ability. Medwell, Strand, and Wray (2009) assessed Year 7 children, and found that the relationship between handwriting skill and writing quality persists at this level too. Evidently, difficulties with handwriting may also lead to lower motivation, loss of confidence, and avoidance of writing practice – resulting in ‘Matthew Effects’, whereby struggling writers fall further behind (Jones & Christensen, 1999). It is important to note that handwriting is crucial to reading development too. James and Englehardt (2012) used MRI scanning to examine the brain activation of pre-literate children during letter perception after handwriting, typing, and tracing. They observed that only handwriting activates visual and motor areas used in the reading system, a finding which indicates that, “letter perception is facilitated by handwriting experience, and [...] that handwriting experience is important for letter processing in the brain” (p. 41). Intervention research, similarly, has demonstrated the benefits of handwriting for memory, with statistically significant improvements in letter recognition and spelling observed when handwriting was used for practice – compared with typing, tracing, or work with letter tiles (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1990; Longcamp et al., 2005).

Turning now to consider spelling: Correlations between spelling skill and writing quality typically range from .4 to .5 in the junior years, and spelling and handwriting combined still account for over 40% of the variance in the writing fluency of intermediate-level students (Graham, et al., 1997). In addition, spelling difficulties may result in writing which is difficult to decipher and may influence a teachers' perceptions of the student's intelligence. Finally, a lack of spelling knowledge may lead to a student avoiding certain words – making it harder for them to precisely express their message.

What has the impact of the Ministry's messaging been on the teaching of transcription in New Zealand? It is a credit to our teaching profession that most teachers know better, with over 50% of my survey respondents agreeing that the explicit teaching of handwriting and spelling is essential (Walls & Johnston, 2023).⁷

The case is clear - we must prioritise spelling and handwriting if we want our students to achieve their potential as writers. So, these skills should be taught explicitly, every day. For handwriting, teachers need to show students how to form letters, and then closely monitor their practice, providing corrective feedback as soon as confusions occur (Graham & Weintraub, 1999). For spelling, students must be taught to work with sounds (phonological awareness) and must learn how these sounds are represented by letters (alphabetic principle). Instruction in meaningful word parts (morphology) and word origins (etymology) is also beneficial. As there are over 200 spelling patterns in written English, there is a lot to cover, but this will be manageable if

instruction follows a logical sequence and is spread over the primary years (Joshi et al., 2008; Stone, 2021).

Recommendation Three:

Revise conceptions of the writing process as 'staged', and instead encourage students to re-read, check, and revise, at the sentence level. To further support this, explicitly teach sentence structure, using Sentence Combining.

Graves and other theorists (for example, Calkins, 1986) told teachers that writing was a staged process: plan, then draft, then edit, then publish, with the first draft happening in a 'free flow' way. This conception of the writing process has also been promulgated through *ELP* (see page 41) though it runs in contradiction to empirical research which demonstrates that skilled writers re-read and revise throughout the drafting process - from their very first sentence (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Anecdotally, I have observed that in many classrooms, misconceptions about a staged process have led to students writing without re-reading, and producing texts with numerous errors which are often very difficult to correct if many pages of writing have already been produced. A much more effective strategy is continual checking at the sentence level, as this results in greater self-awareness, which leads to higher quality writing for both surface and deeper features. Teachers should prompt students to think of their idea, write it, and check it straight away, asking: "Does it sound like I want it to sound"? and, "Does it have a capital letter at the beginning and a full stop at the end"? (Walls & Johnston, 2021).

And what about the explicit teaching of sentence structure? In *ELP* there is very little reference to teaching students about sentences and no ‘sentences’ entry in the index, even. Despite this lack of emphasis, over 80% of my survey respondents indicated that they explicitly teach sentence structure (Walls & Johnston, 2023). These teachers are well justified in their commitment to teaching sentence structure (for an evidence-based discussion, see Hochman & Wexler, 2017). They should now be supported with detailed information about the ‘how,’ as many methods for teaching grammar can be detrimental to student motivation.

So, what is the best way to teach students about different sentence structures? It is through Sentence Combining, which is, in fact, *the only* evidence-based method for teaching grammar (Wyse, 2001).

Here is a summary of the Sentence Combining method: This involves direct teaching and practice with the manipulation of two or more simple sentences, to produce more sophisticated structures. Extra words may also be prompted (or cued). For example, given two simple ‘kernel’ sentences (with cued words displayed in brackets):

(i) *I entered the dark hallway.*

(ii) *The door slammed behind me. (and/as)*

Students could form the compound sentence:

I entered the dark hallway and the door slammed behind me.

Or the complex sentence:

As I entered the dark hallway, the door slammed behind me.

Sentence Combining may work best in short (ten minute) sessions, a few times a week. Use oral practice to avoid students becoming distracted with the demands of transcription. For further information, refer to guides written by Dr Christine Braid (Walls & Braid, 2023) and Bruce Saddler (Saddler, 2005).

Conclusion

Results from national studies of writing achievement demonstrate that we have reached a crisis point in New Zealand with students from low socio-economic backgrounds (in particular) profoundly underserved. While the situation is alarming, it is not surprising given that the New Zealand Ministry of Education has been guided by Whole Language ideology and not science-based research. Many of the Ministry’s recommendations to teachers – for example those promulgated through the *ELP* handbook – are misleading, and so a change of direction is urgently needed.

While many may feel despondent, given current levels of underachievement, there are signs of hope. The first is some acknowledgement by the Ministry, in the ‘Phase One’ document for the Common Practice Model (2023) of the importance of explicit teaching. Specifically, the statement:

In the first phase of learning in primary school, explicit teaching should focus on learning the alphabetic code and how to use this to decode and encode, phonological and

phonemic awareness, handwriting, vocabulary development, oral language skills, and sentence construction. (p. 23)

We await further detail, promised in the 'Phase Two' document, due to be released later this year.

The second, significant source of hope is the commitment of teachers and teacher-leaders, who, despite missteps by policy-makers, continue to strive to do the best for their students. Many have sought out evidence-based information for themselves. This is evident in patterns of response to certain items in my survey, with over 50% of respondents agreeing that the explicit teaching of spelling and handwriting is essential, and over 80% reporting that they explicitly teach sentence structure (Walls & Johnston, 2023). Greater consistency of messaging from the 'top down' would help these numbers to grow. Teachers already using evidence-based methods should be supported to mentor their colleagues, so that high quality programmes can be implemented in every classroom, as soon as possible.

Endnotes

(i) TKI, Te Kete Ipurangi, is a bilingual portal developed by the Ministry of Education, in which teachers can find information and resources to support their teaching of the New Zealand Curriculum, and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa. It is widely used by teachers across Aotearoa.

(ii) As well as being widely promoted by the MOE, recently graduated teachers report that *ELP* continues to be used in university training programmes.

(iii) Why have these practices become so pervasive, despite a lack of evidence to support them? Perhaps because of a tendency of Process Writing advocates to associate their methods with values that we all hold dear, such as freedom and democracy (see Atwell, 1985). This makes honest evaluation difficult (Moorman, Blanton, & McLaughlin, 1994).

(iv) A full description of the methods used in this study are beyond the scope of this article. Please see Walls & Johnston, 2023, for an in-depth description of the study.

(v) Because personal experience writing may be regarded as more 'child-centred', its appeal is unsurprising, especially in New Zealand, where the influence of constructivism has been strong (Lipson, 2020; Walls & Johnston, 2023).

(vi) Evidently, knowledge of topic and genre will need to be taught for these kinds of tasks to work. This could be done by integrating other curriculum areas with writing, and by using model texts (for example, in a middle or senior class Gary Paulsen's *Hatchet* could be used as a model text for the survival story genre).

(vii) This commitment is admirable, especially because many initial teacher education programmes neglect these skills. In McNeil and Kirk's (2013) survey of spelling practices, 69% of respondents reported that they had not received adequate preparation to teach spelling. Blick-Duggan surveyed teachers on their preparedness to teach handwriting and found that just 12% of those trained after 2010 had received any information about the teaching of this crucial skill (Johnston, 2023).

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International Development in Oceania: *An update*

By **Judith Woodham**,
IDOC Chairperson

The International Development in Oceania Committee (IDOC) is a Standing Committee of the International Literacy Association (ILA). It is one of seven regional committees of ILA and has a long history of collaboration and cooperation with and between the Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA) and the New Zealand Literacy Association (NZLA). It is one of seven regional committees of ILA. This collaboration has always been in the interest of building capacity and capabilities of key literacy educators in the Pacific Islands.



The logo of IDOC depicts a wave motif from both Oceania and New Zealand beside the star motif from an Australian legend of the Southern Cross.

The aims of IDOC are to

- facilitate the promotion of ILA membership and council development in the Oceania region,
- identify and/or support literacy projects,
- assist with proposal development for ILA and other grants.

Funding for projects is provided annually by ILA. The Oceania committee submits a proposal based on needs suggested by our members in the Pacific region. Projects over the past two years have included a webinar and extensive resource development.

2022 Webinar

Our 2022 webinar was on the topic of supporting indigenous languages and included four presentations:

- Te Waipounamu Teinakore presented on The Revitalisation of Te Reo Māori in Aotearoa NZ.
- Apolonia Tamata (University of the South Pacific) presented on Revitalising the Fijian Language: Using information texts created by teachers for students in their indigenous language.
- Carol Abiri and Katina Zammit presented on Translanguaging: Connecting to meaning of English texts in Year 4.
- Janet Armitage presented on Anangu practices of literacy.

2023 Projects to promote shared reading in indigenous languages

Resources to support students reading in their local language are very limited in the Oceania region. The projects outlined here will support the work of educators in the Cook Islands and in Papua New Guinea (PNG) to design resources in local indigenous languages or in a combination of local indigenous language and English. The projects commenced in November 2022 and are expected to be completed by November 2023.

In both locations, teachers or preservice teachers are being led by local and/or visiting literacy specialists in at least one workshop on creating resources in indigenous languages to use with children in their local context. Decisions about the topics, language or languages to be used in the resources, are made by the teachers with reference to their context. The IDOC provides support for workshop content including strategies for resource development, genre and topics.

In Papua New Guinea, the project focused on publication of resources such as posters and teacher-made books for reading in local indigenous language or bilingual resources with local indigenous language and English. In the Cook Islands, the focus was on capacity building with local teachers in composing multimodal Indigenous language and bilingual resources to use with children.

Papua New Guinea

Classroom teachers, student teachers and teacher educators participated in this project. Over three days eight big books were created on topics relevant to the participants' culture. They were written in Tok Ples, English and Tok Pisin with drawings and photos to accompany the text.

These works will be digitised for paper-based big books and shared with other Tok Ples participants and the wider education community. The use of these Tok Ples bilingual and multilingual big books with children will support them in learning to read and to hear their Tok Ples language. This will allow them to see

the value in preserving their Tok Ples for their education and also for their community.

Cook Islands

The funding to support the revitalisation of Cook Island Māori was used to create resources featuring quality, engaging Te Reo (the language) for students, most of whom are second language learners of Cook Island Māori. Teachers collaborated to make resources such as:

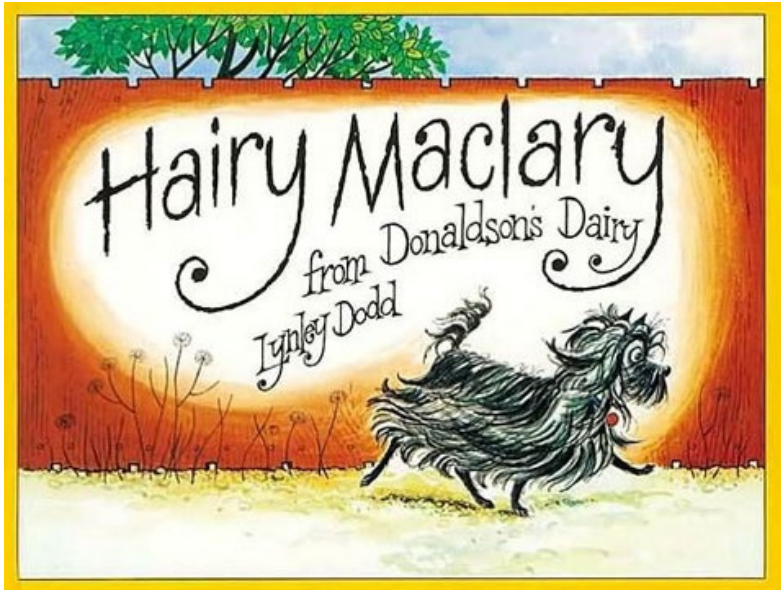
- classroom wall posters and big books
- classroom sentence prompts for games
- classroom resources on Google Slides
- Google Doc collaborative planning
- videos for parents to use at home

This project has meant students have visual aids to support literacy learning and can enjoy reading and writing in Te Reo Māori.

What next?

IDOC members meet via Zoom during the year (usually once a term). Planning is underway for further IDOC webinars to be shared via the ILA website in 2024.

If you have connections with educators in the Pacific region who are passionate about teaching literacy and who may have possible projects in mind for future funding rounds, please contact judith@millerave.school.nz.



The first Hairy Maclary book Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy (1983)

40 Years of Hairy Maclary: *An interview with Dame Lynley Dodd*

By **Todd Burton**

Introducing Dame Lynley



Dame Lynley Dodd

Lynley Dodd, a Tauranga resident for many years, is one of New Zealand's best loved children's authors. Millions of copies of her rhyming picture books featuring the mischievous Hairy Maclary and his irresistible gang of friends have been published worldwide.

Lynley Dodd has won numerous awards in New Zealand for her stories and illustrations. Her first NZ award (jointly with Eve Sutton) was the Esther Glen Medal in 1975, for

My Cat Likes to Hide in Boxes. In 1999 Lynley Dodd received the Margaret Mahy Award (Officially, the Storylines Margaret Mahy Medal and Lecture Award). In 2002 she was made a Distinguished Companion of New Zealand Order of Merit for services to children's literature (in 2009, this was re-designated to Dame Companion of New Zealand Order of Merit). In 2009, Dame Lynley Dodd received the Distinguished Alumni Award from Auckland University. In the same year she also received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Waikato.

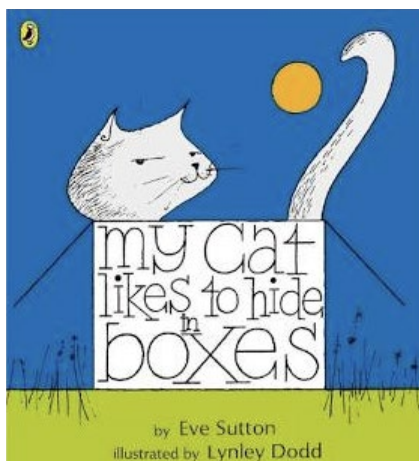
Questions for Dame Lynley

Q1: *I understand you started out as an illustrator. What inspired you to become a children's author?*

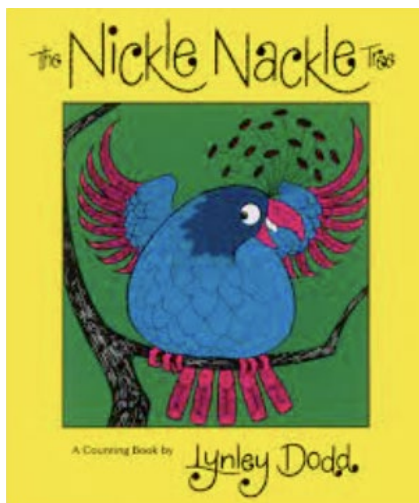
A: It was a combination of two small book-mad children at home, plus the success of Eve Sutton's and my joint picture book, *My Cat Likes to Hide in Boxes* (1974), that meant that I began to have ideas of my own. *The Nickle Nackle Tree* (1976) was my first solo effort.

Q2: *Authors have their own unique writing process. Could you share a bit about your writing routine and how you come up with your ideas?*

A: Picture books have a fairly tight structure and I don't usually begin until I have the basic storyline in my head and can picture the key illustrations. I write my drafts on the old-fashioned computer paper, one lined sheet of which provides enough space for me to plan the division and layout of a complete picture book text. (Plus enough room at the sides for lists of



My Cat Likes to Hide in Boxes (1973).
The first book illustrated by Lynley Dodd.



The Nickle Nackle Tree (1976).
Written and illustrated by Lynley Dodd.

rhyming words and notes to myself!) Mapping out the complete text on one sheet is very useful as it shows visually the structure of the whole book, where the emphasis points are, any 'chorus lines' etc, and this helps to form the shape and balance of the final work. Once I have the text, I produce a separate miniature working dummy in pencil of the pictures and cover. This acts as the model for the final artwork.

Q3: *Your books have memorable characters. How did you develop your characters, and do you have any favourites among them?*

A: A lifetime of watching animals and their quirky behaviour has been the inspiration for so many of my stories, especially the Hairy Maclary and Friends series.

Q4: *What do you consider to be the most rewarding aspect of creating books for children and young readers?*

A: To be able to encourage them to love good language, to use it well and of course to get them hooked on reading!

Q5: *Children's literature often conveys important messages and themes. How do you approach incorporating meaningful themes into your stories without sounding didactic?*

A: As I am dealing mostly with animal behaviour and fun in my books, deep and meaningful themes don't usually feature. However, my characters do occasionally get their comeuppance!



The exploits of Hairy Maclary and his boisterous gang have captivated the imagination of children in New Zealand and around the world.

Q6: *Illustrations play a crucial role in children's books. Is it difficult for you to link illustrations to the text in your stories or are you already thinking about the illustrations as you create the text?*

A: I'm already seeing the story in pictures from the very beginning!

Q7: *Do you have any particular techniques or strategies to keep young readers engaged throughout the book?*

A: Ending a page with a build-up to something that is about to happen on the next! Or to end a page with a question, which demands an answer overleaf and so on. It's terribly important to take the momentum forward. There's nothing so flat as a piece of text that peters out at the wrong moment!

Q8: *Many authors face challenges while writing. What are some of the challenges you've encountered in your writing journey, and how did you overcome them?*

A: I try very hard to foresee any challenges at an early stage and so work out another route or solution before they become a real problem. The fact that I write in rhyme for many of my books is of course an extra hurdle – when writing I tend to conduct myself (literally, with waving hand!) so that I keep the rhythm intact and I have to be brutal if anything threatens to jar or clunk. There are times when I go to bed at night with the problem unsolved, so I have to hope for Eureka moments in the morning!

Q9: *Children can be an honest audience. Have you ever received interesting or surprising feedback from young readers about your books?*

A: Over 50 years I have had many touching or hilarious letters from children all over the world. One of my favourites came from a small boy who wrote, “Your book Scattercat was excellent... It taught me how to fight my brother.”

Q10: *If you had to choose, which book or character of yours do you feel has had the most significant impact on your readers, and why?*

A: I think probably Hairy Maclary and his friends. Why? I suppose the antics and foibles of dogs and cats are familiar to most children everywhere so they love reading about their adventures - and occasional mishaps! Hairy Maclary has just had his 40th birthday so I guess

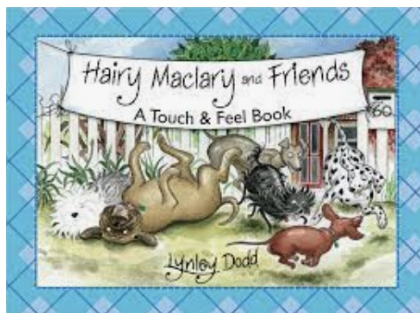
he's had a long time to gather a couple of generations of followers!

Q11: *As a children's author, you may have had opportunities to interact with young readers. Do you have any heartwarming or memorable experiences from meeting your audience?*

A: Many, many memorable experiences over the years. The latest just a fortnight ago, in theatres in Hamilton, Tauranga and Rotorua: performances of Hairy Maclary's Greatest Hits, with musicians from Tauranga's Opus Orchestra, Jan Bolton's music, Jackie Clarke singing, and crowds of children and grownups joining in all the fun!

Q12: *What advice would you give to aspiring children's authors who dream of creating stories for young readers?*

A: We all began somewhere! Good luck!



Hairy Maclary and Friends (2003).



After five years in the making, bronze sculptures of Dame Lynley Dodd's world famous and adored book characters were officially unveiled in 2015 by Kiwi Prime Minister John Key. The bronze sculptures are of Hairy Maclary and eight of his friends: Hercules Morse, Bottomley Potts, Muffin McLay, Bitzer Maloney, Schmitzel von Krumm, Scarface Claw, Slinky Malinki and Zachary Quack.

More information about Dame Lynley

In 2022, Production Company, The Spinoff produced a documentary - *Lynley Dodd: Writing the Pictures, Painting the Words* (uploaded to Youtube) which provides some amazing insights into Dame Lynley's illustrating and writing journey.

From NZLA

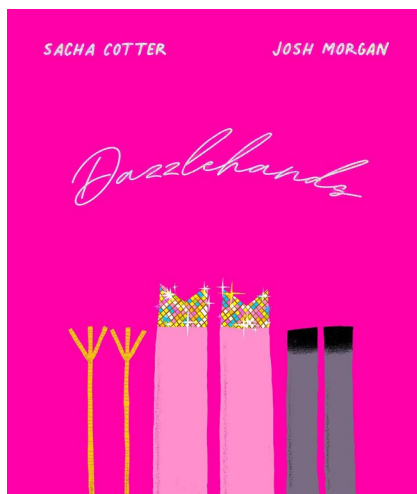
On behalf of the NZLA community, we would like to celebrate you Dame Lynley, as both an author and an illustrator, for your decades of service to children's literacy. Your books are filled with brilliant rhythm and rhyme, rich vocabulary, and detailed illustrations that are second to none.

A plethora of New Zealand picture books

By **Zac McCallum**

Librarian, Halswell School, Christchurch

There have been so many wonderful New Zealand picture books published recently that it is difficult to focus on just one or two. Here are my picks of the best recent picture books from New Zealand authors and illustrators.



Dazzlehands

Author: **Sacha Cotter**

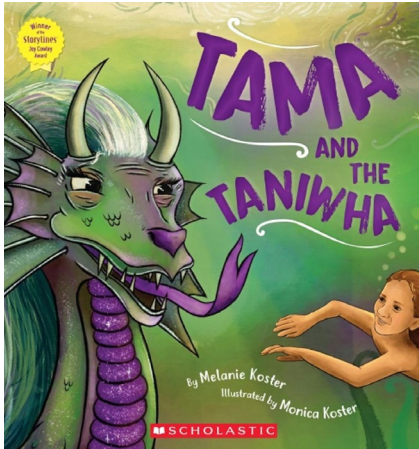
Illustrator: **Josh Morgan**

Publisher: **Unity Books, 2023**

The farmer is having some trouble with pig. He just wants pig to say what pigs are supposed to say, but every time he tries, pig just says “Dazzlehands.” The farmer keeps trying but the pig just busts out with “train hands, rain hands, fly-it-like-a-plane hands. Bursting with the razzle, gotta liberate these Dazzlehands.”

This is my New Zealand picture book of the year! Everyone needs this book in their life. It is an absolute joy to read each and every time... and kids of all ages love it. Not only is the text a whole lot of fun (and a work out for your mouth and tongue), the illustrations are positively bursting with colour. There are fluoro pink images, sparkles and rainbows galore. I certainly wish I had pig’s dance moves. Sacha and Josh’s previous book, *The Bomb*, is one of my all-time favourite New Zealand books and *Dazzlehands* is even better. I’m calling this the Margaret Mahy Book of the Year in 2024.

Book reviews



Tama and the Taniwha

Author: **Melanie Koster**

Illustrator: **Monica Koster**

Publisher: **Scholastic, 2023**

On a hot Summer’s day, Grandad and Grandma have taken their mokopuna to the lake to cool off. Tama’s big sisters warn him not to put his waewae or his kumu in the water, otherwise the taniwha will get him. His sisters’ description of the taniwha “with slimy green scales, and silvery, beady eyes and gnashing, slashing teeth, and a purple pointy tongue,” make Tama apprehensive about getting in the water. Just when Tama gets his courage up and dives under the water, the taniwha reaches out and grabs each of his sisters. As they splash out of the lake, screaming about the taniwha, Tama comes face-to-face with the taniwha and realises that it is not so terrible after all.

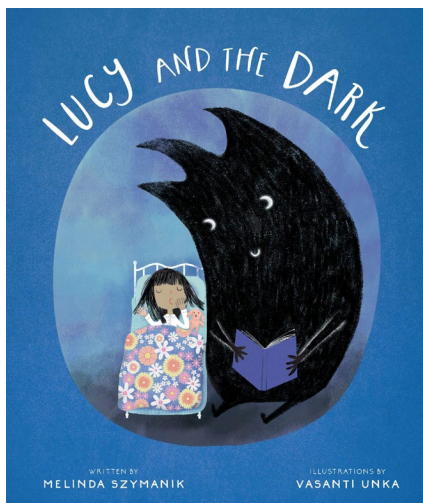
Tama and the Taniwha is a delightful picture book, bursting with the joys of a Kiwi summer – cooling off in the heat with a dip in the water and fun with whānau. There is plenty of anticipation in the text, wondering if we’ll see the taniwha.

The 32-page paperback picture book is aimed at children in the 3+ age group and adds to their understanding of te reo Māori. The book introduces a phrase that is repeated throughout the story, and each time a different body part in te reo Māori is featured in the phrase, along with a helpful glossary at the bottom of the page.

This delightful and experienced author, Melanie Koster, won the Storylines Joy Cowley Award in the NZ Book Awards for children and young adults in 2022.

Illustrator, Monica Koster, enhances the text with vibrant illustrations adding excitement and intrigue. This is her debut picture book and I’m certain we’ll see more of her illustrations in the future. I particularly like the way that Monica has added sparkle to her illustrations.

Book reviews



Lucy and the Dark

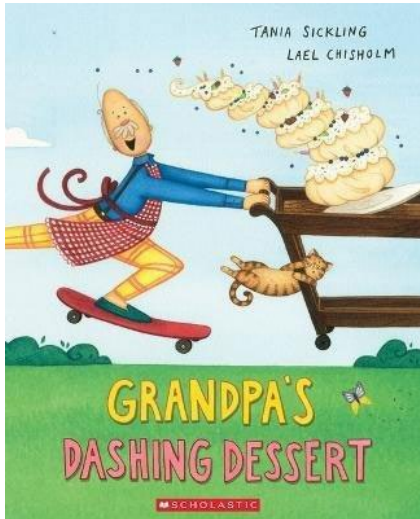
Author: **Melinda Szymanik**

Illustrator: **Vasanti Unka**

Publisher: **Penguin Random House, 2023**

Lucy needs her night-light to help her feel safe, but when it turns off by itself one night, Lucy is left in the dark. It's on this night that she meets the Dark. Lucy and Dark start talking and she realises that she is not afraid of Dark. Most people are afraid of Dark and they get banished to corners, closets and closed rooms. Lucy and Dark become best friends and decide to go on an adventure together – they explore caves, graves and tunnels. Finally, Lucy and Dark come to realise how much people and animals need Dark. They return home and promise to always be friends and go adventuring again together.

Lucy and the Dark is a sweet story about an unusual friendship that shows young readers how important the dark really is. How would we get any sleep without the dark? How would nocturnal animals, like our kiwi, survive without the dark? Melinda's text and Vasanti's illustrations work perfectly together to create a reassuring tale that will help young children look differently at the dark. The glow-in-the-dark features of the front and back cover are a beautiful feature of this book... and they glow brightly for a long time after the lights are turned out.



Grandpa's Dashing Dessert

Author: **Tania Sickling**

Illustrator: **Lael Chisholm**

Publisher: **Scholastics, 2023**

Grandpa loves cooking. He's good at thinking on his feet and he creates food that is a work of art. He's also very good at making a mess. One summer's day Grandpa whips up the most marvellous pavlova, piled high with whipped cream and fruit. Unfortunately for Grandpa, the tea trolley gets away on him and he has to chase it down the hill. When Grandpa can't slow it down, it's up to someone else to save the day.

This is Tania Sickling and Lael Chisholm's second collaboration and it is just as brilliant as their first book, *Grandpa vs. Swing*. The reason I loved *Grandpa vs. Swing* was the perfect rhythm of the story, and Tania Sickling has achieved this feat again in *Grandpa's Dashing Dessert*. The story bounces along, anticipation builds as the rhyme and rhythm emphasise Tania's glorious use of language. Lael Chisholm's illustrations are full of fun and humour, whether it is Grandpa's acrobatic cooking antics or Grandma skidding in to save the day. *Grandpa's Dashing Dessert* is going to be one of my favourite go-to, read-alouds in my library. I can't wait to read it again and again to all of my classes.

Tai Tokerau

After a tenuous start to last year, Tai Tokerau Literacy Association was thrilled to host Emeritus Professor Russell Bishop, PhD, ONZM in Northland where he delivered workshops both in Kerikeri and Whangarei. The events were very well-supported and addressed some current issues and concerns in education regarding the achievement of Māori and other marginalised students.

There were separate sessions for both school leaders and teachers based on his books *Leading to the North-East: Ensuring the Fidelity of Relationship-Based Learning* and *Teaching to the North-East; Relationship-Based Learning in Practice*. For the leaders' event, the focus was on how leaders lead to the north-east to create the infrastructure, resourcing and conditions for teachers to teach to the north-east to address the literacy crisis. Equity and excellence is achieved through collaboration - building a common code of pedagogy, consistency of practice and cohesion of teaching where programmes are enacted across an entire school with all stakeholders receiving the same messages about high expectations. Failure is not an option! Deliberate acts of teaching and high levels of relationships are key to successful learning.

During the teachers' event, Russell outlined aspects of the literacy "crisis" and gave a summary of three different schools that had worked with him to improve their overall results, especially relating to Māori students. Based upon



his Relationships First model, he outlined how deliberate acts of teaching and inclusion of discursive practices are pivotal factors in raising achievement of learners.

We now feel as a council that there is a solid path forward where planned events won't need to be cancelled. Hooray!

At this year's AGM, Anne Dickson from the National Library service informed and entertained us with a focus on the power of books in the classroom. She shared the elements to develop a reading culture in schools with engaged readers:

- home and school partnerships
- reading experiences
- access
- knowledge and practice
- reading environment
- leadership and expectations
- school library and community connections

Anne shared her favourite books with us and talked about what makes them special and great literature to use with our tamariki. There is a rich resource available to us through the National Library Service and Tai Tokerau

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Literacy Association encourages you all to access this.

Earlier this term we hosted Sheena Cameron and Lousie Dempsey from The Literacy Place and 50 teachers enjoyed a practical workshop on poetry and using *The Poetry Book* to support us with our teaching. The “dynamic duo” did not disappoint. The workshop focused on building vocabulary, promoting student voice, creativity and fun through poetry with explicit teaching of transferable skills in all areas of literacy. Authentic contexts were front and centre to improve outcomes for our tamariki.

Auckland

Here in Auckland, our ALA committee is entering a phase of renewed energy, commitment and activity. In particular, August has been a busy month for us. We recently hosted our biennial *Young Authors and Illustrators* event, with four exceptional authors/illustrators and about 100 children from schools all over Auckland. We were privileged to have these excellent people:

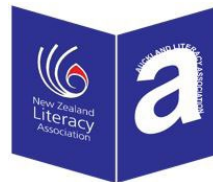
- Raymond McGrath – writer, illustrator, musician, animation director
- Stephanie Thatcher – author, illustrator, graphic designer
- Minky Stapleton – illustrator
- Peter Millet – author

The children were captivated by these special presenters, and the differences in their style and content contributed to the richness of their presentations.

Sheena and Louise demonstrated how scaffolded modelling with quality exemplars and clear success criteria enable all students to achieve success. They challenged us to slow down, celebrate and respond confidently and responsively to our students.

We are a strong group of committed and passionate literacy fans and enjoy the satisfaction of bringing quality learning experiences to our colleagues.

Annmaree MacGregor
Tai Tokerau Literacy Association



Their messages had some common themes that the children could use in their own work:

- Thorough preparation may be time-consuming but is worth the effort.
- Get to know your character/s – their strengths, environments, their appearances.
- Real life ‘stuff’ can be infused into writing and illustrating.
- Use different models and really look, and reread to get ideas and drawings the way you want them.
- Read work aloud to check that the language has exactly the rhythm you want.

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We noticed many children writing furiously, recording the pearls of wisdom. He grinned and said, “I love the way they are using puns. I’m going to use some, too.” All of the speakers did indeed use language in rich ways, bring fun to the ‘beesness’.

Our Term 3 *Gala Dinner* event featured the superb Dr Rae Si’ilata and was held, as always, at the Parnell Conference Centre. Rae shared her wisdom about culturally and linguistically sustaining practices and illustrated this with many examples from her own upbringing and experiences. As a really sound educator, she was theoretically well based. It was extra special to have her acknowledge the work of Professor Emeritus Warwick Elley and Professor Janet Gaffney – and they were both in attendance. On a personal note, Rae and Warwick’s daughter were friends from their secondary school days, so this was extra special. And, of course, the food

was really yummy. We all look forward to each year’s Gala Event and have been delighted that Rae’s contributions simply added to this history!

In Term 4 Dr John Milne from AUT will be sharing his research into *Reading For Pleasure* – a very timely topic given the current Curriculum Refresh. More to anticipate, especially as the event is being held in the magnificent school library at Massey Primary School. We’ll all want to listen, then sit and read to our heart’s content.

In conclusion we’d like to publicly thank outgoing editor Dr Steph Dix for her constant enthusiasm, skill, encouragement and kindness, and to say a special welcome to Kirsten Kean and Dr Chris Thornley.

Heather Bell
ALA delegate

Taranaki

After a cold wet winter, cherry trees are beginning to flower and daffodils are blooming prolifically here in Taranaki to remind us that spring really is approaching!

On a sunny note, past president Sarah McCord kindly attended a dinner with us at the end of last term to celebrate NZLA Service Awards for Sally Morch and Jackie Cameron, both of whom have been long serving members of our local association; in Sally’s case, other branches too.



At our last committee meeting we heard feedback from AGM and noted areas we as a committee we would like to follow up on, beginning with increasing our contribution to Books for Oceania from \$400 to \$1000.00 to include donations from the years when there were no conferences.

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The Local Liaison Group of SPELD NZ are interested in more learning and sharing with other colleagues. We look forward to welcoming them to the TLA.

As we approach International Literacy Day on the 8th, we have our annual boxes of books ready to present one to each babe born at New Plymouth and Hawera maternity hospitals throughout the month of September. Our thanks to Scholastic who have been very generous with this discounted purchase of 'We're Going on a (Kiwi) Holiday'; a brightly illustrated, romping rhythmical story by Suzy Cato and Arthur Baysting.

Manawatū

Manawatū Literacy Association (MLA) has had a fantastic 2023 with new initiatives and special events for our area. The committee are so pleased to have welcomed new members to our association this year and to have established positive relationships with other groups, writers, schools, marae, and iwi. We are looking forward to this continuing and growing in 2024. It is an exciting time to be part of the association.

In Term 2, we hosted a Reading for Pleasure Festival in collaboration with the Palmerston North City Library. The public library is a wonderful space in Palmerston North and we really appreciated their support. Reading for Pleasure is such an important aspect of literacy, with research having shown it to improve outcomes for people

We have had a quiet term three on the workshop front, but in October, look forward to again welcoming Emma Nahna, Sound Foundations for Literacy, to facilitate a full day workshop on assessment and reporting.

We wish Southland Literacy Association all the best for a hugely successful, drought-breaking conference this year and anticipate inspirational feedback from our attendees.

Jackie Cameron
Taranaki Literacy Association



of all ages in a variety of ways. I am proud that the MLA showcased this. The festival catered for many different readers - children, teachers, librarians, and other adult readers. Stories were read, crafts were made, hunts were scavenged, poetry was spoken (and sung!), and conversations were had.

Many thanks to our contributing local writers; Diana Neild, Kirsty Bennett, Rachel Doré, Paiana Whaanga, and Glenn Colquhoun. It was wonderful to hear their work in person. Thanks also to our experts who shared their knowledge about the importance of

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Reading for Pleasure, Alan Dingley (who is also New Zealand's new Te Awhi Rito, Reading Ambassador - a local lad!) and Ruth Boyask from Unitec.

In Term 3, we hosted our annual series of Zoom workshops. First up, the Horowhenua Resource Teacher of Literacy spoke about strategies for building a reading culture in schools and classrooms. Next we heard from long-time MLA committee member, Judy Aitken, who shared her research into smoothly and appropriately transitioning those new to school into more formal reading instruction in classrooms. Lastly, the founder and a long-time participant of the #NZReadaloud, Kerri Thomson and Sandra Howard respectively, gave us the low-down on this connected read-aloud initiative, how it works, and how well it has been received by participants. Having these webinars recorded was really useful for many members who were unable to attend the live sessions.

We were also lucky enough to hold a special event for a group of schools at Kereru marae in Koputaroa, near Levin. Te Kenehi Te Ira and Kararaina Te Ira took time out of their busy schedules to share local pūrākau, knowledge, and taught us how to compose a conservation report for taonga. The kai was great too! This exclusive event, exceptionally organised by our MLA secretary, Maria Rahui-Palmer, was really well-received and we are hoping we can support similar events in the future. Having knowledge of the history and stories from your local area is vital for teaching students in that area.

Another offering we have been experimenting with is an MLA podcast. Our president, Belinda Whyte, dubs it her "incredibly amateur podcast" as she has just been dabbling with the format and is not yet the perfect podcaster! One excellent episode was with Emily Reid, founder of Ecodrama in Scotland, about their "Out to Play" initiative which incorporates storytelling, drama, and sustainability education in junior classes.

It was wonderful for many of us to be together again for our national conference in Invercargill in September this year. The Southland Literacy Association organised and hosted an amazing event. MLA was well represented with four award winners! Congratulations again and thanks for making us look good, to our Viv Wimms' award winners, Lee Gibbs (2022 recipient) Larina Turner (2023 recipient), and our Marie Clay Literacy Trust Early Years' Teacher winner, Maria Jenkins, and our Experienced Teacher winner, Bronwen Walters.

Throughout 2023 it has been nice to maintain a strong team within our committee. We respect each other and have great conversations about literacy. It is a great group to be part of - come and join us in 2024!

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Southland

The Southland Literacy Association has hosted some fantastic events recently.

The NZLA 45th Literacy Conference - 'Lighting the Literacy Pathway'

One of our significant achievements this year was the success of the NZLA 45th Literacy Conference, held on 25 - 27 September 2023. This was the culmination of over two years planning and organising by our fantastic committee. We were proud to showcase some Southland highlights and provide engaging and useful presentations to our attendees.

Student Postcard Competition

We organised a Student Postcard Competition to promote literacy



and showcase our region. Students from local schools and colleges were encouraged to create postcards highlighting the unique features of Southland. This initiative aimed to foster creativity and appreciation for our region while promoting literacy skills among students. The competition had enthusiastic participation from schools all over the region, with entries reflecting the rich diversity of Southland's landscapes and what is important to our tamariki. The judging panel had a very challenging task of selecting winners from the impressive submissions. Prizes were awarded to the

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top six designs of each year level, and all postcards (over 250!) were distributed in registration packs at our conference.



International Literacy Day Celebration

To commemorate International Literacy Day we hosted a special event to acknowledge the winners of the Student Postcard Competition. The event was held after school on the 7th of September at Sacred Heart School and included an opportunity for friends and family to view their child's work and celebrate their success.

The Southland Literacy Association has had another productive and enjoyable year. A further highlight was that our 'Books for Babies' initiative has reached a significant milestone - 25 years since it first began and we currently provide a book for every newborn in Southland each year. Our committee continues to be made up of a fantastic group of people who are enthusiastic about supporting literacy in our community.

Kirsten Kean

Southland Literacy Association President



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