

Not enough done to bridge NZ's reading gap

College of Education (CoE) Pro Vice-Chancellor Prof. James Chapman has called for more effort to bridge the widening gap between good and poor readers and halt the downward trend of NZ children's reading abilities compared with those of other countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Prof. Chapman says the recent Dyslexia Awareness Week put the spotlight on the 70,000 children in NZ who are affected by the learning disability and the need for effective delivery of research-based teaching to meet these children's needs, as well as a more robust policy to identify them.

According to international surveys, reading abilities of NZ children are falling in comparison to their OECD counterparts.

"NZ teachers have not been prepared to meet the special needs of students with dyslexia. Reading researchers at Massey, however, are very familiar with the latest research on the causes, characteristics, and remedial approaches relating to dyslexia," Prof. Chapman says.

"NZers generally do not have as good an understanding of dyslexia as in other countries where the disability has been recognised for decades."

Prof. Bill Tunmer from Massey's School of Educational Studies, says the MoE's reading recovery programme simply isn't working. He says some students are not suited to the programme – particularly those with the highest risk of not being able to read – and that many teachers are not

equipped to cope with the challenges.

"The teaching of literacy skills is different to other areas of education," Prof. Tunmer says.

The University offers the only Master of Literacy Education programme in NZ. The programme includes course work that directly addresses topics relating to persistent literacy learning difficulties – dyslexia – and is taught by leading international authorities in dyslexia research.

The CoE will host a conference at the Wellington campus next January to present the latest research and practice on dyslexia to teachers, parents and policymakers.

More information on the conference can be found at: <http://www.eenz.com/dyslexiaconf09/>

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