

Submission to Literacy Advisory Committee

I have read the scope of the inquiry and I am impressed with its depth. I taught early childhood for forty years. I hold a Bachelor of Education from the Uni. of Tas. I taught in the Early childhood area in various Tasmanian Schools for twenty-five years, and then in International schools overseas for fifteen years with the majority of children being ESL. My last school was the International School of Stuttgart, an International Baccalaureate School, that was considered a lighthouse school in the region for literacy and ESL.

I'm impressed with the work been done in Tasmanian schools to address some of the socio-economic effects on Children's literacy. From my work in International schools teaching Prep I know that this could be better addressed with small class sizes Kindergarten to Grade one – no more than 18 students per class, and an English-speaking assistant working alongside the classroom teacher. I'm not sure this would pass the 'politician' test but I am sure we would see amazing upward results with this more one-on-one approach.

I believe EC teachers to need be multi-faceted in their approach to literacy learning. There is not one programme or method that would suit all children with their differing experiences and abilities. Teachers need to have a range of methods in their repertoire.

Therefore, I am aghast at the recent emphasis on commercial phonic programmes in Tasmanian schools and emphasis on testing phonics as a 'be all' of measuring literacy progress. From my experience in the Sixties when phonics teaching was de rigeur, to my experience in the late 2000 when in Prep at an International School teachers could use an American phonics programme, and did, and Australian teachers drew on many methods and strategies. ACER testing in this latter example showed the multi-faceted experiences scored much higher on ACER testing.

Of course, I believe in phonics as one of the strategies in Literacy learning, but phonics can be introduced and taught in a way that is relevant to the child's and classroom experiences, and in conjunction with other strategies in an inquiry programme.

I was horrified to see the first image in your accompanying document to this inquiry was a whiteboard in an EC classroom with a teacher working with unrelated phonics in a whole class situation. That is not Literacy teaching to me. Where's the joy, the hands-on, the activity (not a work sheet), the talking, the rich books (Not 'Tim sat on a mat')?

Phonics is important but only if taught in a way that is relevant to the child. A commercial programme can never do this. Its an easy way out. It's a tick the box reaction that will never achieve the desired results.

Thank you,
Louise Cunningham