



***Submission to the  
Tasmanian Literacy  
Advisory Panel  
‘Setting the Scene’  
Community Consultation  
Paper***



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### **ABOUT SPEECH PATHOLOGY TASMANIA**

Speech Pathology Tasmania (SPT) is a private speech pathology practice established in its current form in 2002. It is a dedicated team of speech pathologists and administration professionals at all career stages from new graduates through to decades of experience.

Since 2002 a gradually increasing proportion of SPT's caseload has consisted of children, adolescents and adults seeking services to support their literacy acquisition difficulties. Our work is consistently with those learners who have the greatest neurodevelopmental obstacles to overcome. This is the population we were trained to serve and have become skilled in serving. Moreover, we now find, with this embedded skills-base, that our services have adapted, extended and evolved to support the communication needs of increasingly varied members of community.

The workspace of our practice is broad, open, evolving, reflective, and connected to community in schools, childcare centres, private homes, homelessness services, prisons, the broader justice system including the courts – and also in our clinics.

### **ENDORSEMENT**

SPT wishes to endorse the submission made to the Literacy Advisory Panel by the Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance. Please read this present submission as a multiplication to your consciousness of all that is within the Alliance's submission, further supported by our local and differing story of private service delivery.

### **THE DILEMMA**

SPT's clinicians have been privileged to have worked with its clients and their families. But we have always experienced a deep dilemma in service delivery. It happens that we are all white, middle-class women. And we work largely with families who have the same or similar social privilege as us; families who can exercise their agency, resources (financial, intellectual, social), and privilege, to seek private services for

their loved ones. We are painfully aware that not all families are in this position. This has been our dilemma – reaching these families.

We are grateful for the NDIS, complex as it is. It has been a genuine support to bring our training in speech and language sciences to a wider group with greater complexities of human need – including greater complexities in literacy acquisition. But we know that the complexity of the NDIS itself is a barrier to many families whose social resources are weaker.

As a clinic, our connectedness to families and community has gifted us long and deep experience. The knitting together of our grassroots experience with this service-delivery dilemma has been fuel for us. Our experience of discomfort, compassion, and sense of corporate and personal responsibility to act in response to this dilemma, led directly to the birth of the literacy and communication skills charity Connect42<sup>1</sup>; it also led to the development of extensive screening and therapy delivery with and within Catholic Education Tasmania; to the implementation of local, expert training for practitioners and parents in the Yoshimoto Orton-Gillingham<sup>2</sup> approach; and to the development of resources that can be used without a speech pathologist delivering them, to reach a greater number of families.

We are pleased to have activated our skills and made these contributions. But there is a better way.

### **THE BETTER WAY**

The better way, of course, is that schools and classroom-based practitioners become fully equipped with the ever-consolidating and expanding body of knowledge and resources to teach language, reading, and writing successfully to the most complex of learners.

Classroom-based practitioners are in the better position to do this because of the dailiness of their experiences with students. Learning the code of written language needs

practice, practice, practice. This is especially so for learning English, which has one of the most complex written language systems (orthography). This practice is best

*Several years ago, two of our team were in training in the Yoshimoto Orton-Gillingham approach. There were 28 others in the class. All were teachers or special education teachers. The trainer invited everyone to tell a little about themselves and their work.*

*The first teacher in the inner semicircle began. "I'm a teacher. I've been teaching for 15 years. I'm here because my daughter has dyslexia. She's eight and she hasn't learned to read at school, and I want to know what to do to teach her".*

*The second. "I'm a special education teacher. My son has dyslexia. I've realised that I don't know how to teach him to read. My son! I'm a teacher and I can't teach my son [tears]"*

*The third. "I've been teaching for thirty years. I've seen children come through my classes who couldn't learn. Now I've just found out that my grandson has dyslexia and I want to know what to do to help him".*

*And so on... for all 28 teachers! It was the **deeply personal** experience that threw out any defences and brought them to eagerness to know what they then knew they didn't know.*

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<sup>1</sup> Connect 42

<sup>2</sup> This is an approach that trains educators and caregivers in how to understand, implement and support the development of all levels of written language explicitly and systematically to children and adults.

configured in the places in which children are living their daily, best lives. Namely, in schools; with people they know and trust and who can abundantly develop their self-esteem in genuine ways, which are simultaneously witnessed by their peers. And where everyone else is also engaged in the version of productive, expansive, normal activity that is pitched at the level that is right for them.

### OUR INSIGHTS

Here are some of our insights about what can be done to improve the literacy rate in Tasmania to 100% literacy. These insights are drawn from our experiences as speech and language practitioners working with our clients and alongside many different schools in all education sectors:

1. Understand, first, the baseline diversity of the language used in our community to describe and talk about literacy. The work of building new and shared knowledge starts with building the shared language with which humans cognitively manipulate their worlds and their growing understandings. A collection of community opinions<sup>3</sup>, gathered in 2018, offers such a baseline. It reveals the size of the cloth. There are very great differences in language and conceptualisations within these opinion pieces. But there is a very great unity of spirit for flourishing change. To improve literacy to 100% we need to build *shared language* about literacy, based on the best scientific knowledge. Shared language will yield shared conceptualisations. Which can then be followed through to shared science-based practice.
2. Teach the sciences of reading, writing, linguistics, and orthography to pre-service teachers in their university courses at all levels of teaching practice – early childhood, primary and secondary. This will allow them to enter their exciting, professional field *with* this knowledge. It will make this high-level knowledge, common knowledge.
3. Teach the sciences of reading, writing, linguistics, and orthography to all currently qualified teachers. This will allow them to continue in their exciting, professional field *with* this knowledge. It will make this high-level knowledge, common knowledge.
4. Teach all school-based practitioners the International Phonetic Alphabet and phonology as they pertain to English. Deep comprehension of the difference between a ‘sound’ (speech sound) and a ‘letter’ emerges from this learning. To teach literacy to challenged learners without confusing those learners, teachers need to bring accurate language to the essential difference between a sound

*“I’ve never before thought about the fact that you can’t **write** a **sound**. Sound is vibration in the air!”*  
~ Teacher ~

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<sup>3</sup> Communicating: The Heart of Literacy Symposium ([squarespace.com](https://squarespace.com))

and a letter. When school-based practitioners do not embody understanding of this difference themselves, they cannot be accurate in their explanations and demonstrations to students. Unfortunately, we see evidence of this non-comprehension every day. This material is simple to learn, but it hasn't been a routine part of teachers' training and needs to be. It will powerfully help to shape the shared language of literacy instruction.

5. Structure for thorough screenings of the language and phonological processing skills of all learners to take place regularly. This assessment will yield knowledge of individual learners and their needs. It will also yield daily, lived, worked-with knowledge of the cognitive skills underpinning reading and writing, to practitioners who have not yet had opportunity to become thoroughly steeped in this knowledge. This is knowledge that also needs to be supported with regular out-of-the-classroom theoretical and practical training for all school-based practitioners.
6. Share screening results, under conditions of high respect and confidentiality, with all ground-level practitioners who need to understand those results. This empowers the practitioners to consistently respond to each learner at the learner's individual points of learning breakthrough.
7. Use screening results to support intentional tailoring of multi-tiered systems of support, nuanced to the configuration of learners in the class. This must include regular evidence-based monitoring (at least twice per term) of skills-progress, which must then dynamically lead to practice change for each child in accordance with the results of the monitoring.
8. Teach all school-based practitioners how to teach vocabulary explicitly. Much of what we name as a *literacy* problem, exists first as a *spoken language* problem. Explicit teaching of vocabulary (and all the skills named in this submission) is not just for the early childhood years. It must continue actively throughout primary and secondary schooling. High levels of community vocabulary empower broad comprehension and knowledge. And ultimately through these things, informed, positive acts of citizenship, and thereby, democracy and upholding of human rights. Thus, we quickly see that so much that is valuable for society depends upon having gained vocabulary.
9. Teach all school-based practitioners how to explicitly teach all components of enriched literacy experience. This means teaching all layers of written language and its intersections with spoken language – morphology, syntax, semantics, discourse, etymology, fluency, intonation.

*"I love hearing you explain this stuff. It makes so much sense when you explain it. Why weren't we taught this at university?!"*  
~ Teacher ~

10. Ongoing mentoring and support for implementation of all the above (and below) is then essential. Time needs to be structured into teachers' programs for this mentoring and reflection to take place without hurriedness. This also supports wellbeing.

11. Hold and maintain high expectations of students. *Having* these high

*"He's had so much intervention. Can we really justify giving him more? Is he ever likely to get this?" 😞  
~ Teacher ~*

expectations may itself be a point of new knowledge for some practitioners. They may not have had training or experience in what it is possible to achieve in learners who have traditionally and unreflectingly been labelled as low-level. They may not have had training or experience in the *number* of repetitions that may be needed, and the length of *time* that may be needed to embed a new skill. They may not have knowledge of how to break-down a task into smaller component parts to make it possible for a challenged learner to achieve the next step of success. This knowledge is a necessary part of holding high expectations.

12. The widely used language of 'scaffolding' is not always underpinned by the scientific knowledges of task-analysis and error-correction procedures. These knowledges about structured and explicit skills-teaching need to be actively acquired by practitioners at a widespread level. They need to be part of ongoing professional learning and upskilling.

*"Oh my gosh, that thing you showed me how to do using the 'known distractors'; it just made him learn those new letters so fast!"  
~ Teacher Assistant~*

13. Building the knowledges required to teach not test, to support language-based retrieval (word retrieval) in learners and understand the cognitive foundations of these skills.

14. At school-level, community-level, and systems-level, share the news of learner successes and class successes. Share story and share data. Avoid sanitised 'comms' and instead share positive news with wholeheartedness and hopeful abandon. Establishment of a trustful, school-wide, community-wide, and systems-wide culture of celebration and non-cynicism supports the wellbeing of not just the learners but also those who hold and care for those learners – the teachers and other practitioners. The work of supporting success in learners should reciprocally bring joy to practitioners. If it doesn't, the practitioner needs positive support. Or the system needs positive support. Sharing positive stories and receiving them from other places, without negative judgment, supports and inspires practitioners, the community, and systems-level supporters.

15. Make it safe for practitioners to ask for help. Actively build a culture of hope, trust, and high expectation within learners, practitioners, school leadership,

and the individuals within the systems of sectoral governance. Bryk and Schneider's<sup>4</sup> work on the uplift of relational trust in schools, names powerful theory toward the cultivation of such a school culture – respect, competence, personal regard, and integrity. And the evidence-based trust intervention, *Leading Together*<sup>5</sup>, developed and implemented by Parker J. Palmer and his teams<sup>6</sup>, offers method to transfer theory to lived reality.

### **THANK YOU**

As a team, we are very grateful to the Tasmanian Government for its leadership in structuring the Literacy Advisory Panel. But our thanks are not political. It is larger than politics. Our thanks are for what can be enabled for the children of today, destined to become the contributors and leaders of equity tomorrow.

As a team we are very grateful to you, the members of the Literacy Advisory Panel. We know that many of you are giving your own time to absorb and respond to all that you must take-in to do this important work. We wish you strength, clear minds, and full hearts for equity, opportunity, and flourishing.

As a team, we are filled with hope about the work that the Panel is charged with and has been given opportunity to do. We reject any cynical evaluations and despair that nothing will change. So often, here in this beautiful island State, we hear Tasmanians talking about Tasmania being small enough to be nimble, and therefore well able to make flexible changes toward our flourishing. This work of the Literacy Advisory Panel is the perfect opportunity to really demonstrate that hope for nimbleness is not whimsical but is part of the character of being Tasmanian – quietly pursuing the extraordinary.

As a team, we wholeheartedly encourage those who will be charged with the implementation work that will arise from the Panel's recommendations to act with courage, speak truth to power, and not become tangled into languishing. Shared encouragement is part of supporting us all to build the collaboration, confidence, and wide culture of respect that will put wings on Tasmania's extraordinary target of 100% literacy – and see it fly.

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4 Bryk, A. & Schneider, B. 2002, *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement*, Rose Series in Sociology, Russell Sage Foundation, NY.

<sup>5</sup> [Leading Together: Strengthening Relational Trust in Schools • Center for Courage & RenewalCenter for Courage & Renewal \(couragerenewal.org\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Welcome to the Center for Courage & Renewal • Center for Courage & RenewalCenter for Courage & Renewal \(couragerenewal.org\)](#)

As a team, we have expectation of 100% literacy in Tasmania. We know it is possible. It is certainly possible amongst our learners. We welcome it. We are privileged to be part of this opportunity for change that brings equity.

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'Rosalie Martin' and the signature on the right is 'Linda McKillop'. Both are written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rosalie Martin & Linda McKillop

On behalf of the Speech Pathology Tasmania team