

CODE REaD Dyslexia Network would like to thank the Panel for its commitment to moving toward a science-based approach to literacy instruction. Having advocated in this space for many years, we are acutely aware of the significant cultural resistance such a move involves, and applaud those members who have taken a stand in an effort to improve outcomes for all children in the Tasmanian public sector.

Our responses to specific points within the Final Consultation Report are included in the prescribed template below. We would be happy to provide more information on any of the below points if required.

Note: The sections in the Paper which are headed "What this tells us" will be the basis for the Panel's recommendations.

Where questions are broken into life stages (early years, school years and adult years), you can provide responses to any or all life stages.

Please indicate clearly at the beginning of any responses you wish to remain confidential.

Unless indicated as confidential, responses will be treated as public information and published on our website. Please see the [Public Submissions Policy](#) for further information.

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Question One: Are there any key themes we have not identified to improve literacy across:

The Early Years (0-4 years-old)

The Panel states "Parental involvement in a child's reading has been found to be the most important determinant of language and emergent literacy" (p. 15)

While CODE REaD supports the notion of a community-wide framework for improving literacy, we advocate for the necessity of a well-designed education system which can teach nearly **all** children to read and write *despite* disadvantage the child may experience in their early years, pre-school home literacy environment.

We are alarmed by the DECYP's apparent 'outsourcing' of responsibility for reading and writing acquisition, to parents. The Department **of** Education's rebranding to the Department **for** Education appears to have paved the way for DECYP to suggest its role is to *promote* Education, rather than to *provide* and *own responsibility* for it.

Such an 'outsourcing' of education can – and does – easily cross the fine line between encouraging parents to read to their children, and victim-blaming parents for their children's reading failures. Indeed, we at CODE REaD hear stories – every day – of parents who have endlessly and dotingly read to their pre-school children, only to have their teachers suggest – when discussing their child's reading difficulties – that their child was obviously not read enough books. The Panel should be careful to avoid perpetuating this already-ingrained myth.

Seidenberg (2017) notes "emphasis on the importance of reading to children creates the impression that it plays the same role in learning to read as speaking to children plays in their

learning to talk. That's not correct... Among the first questions that will be asked of the parents of a child who is struggling is whether they read to the child and if there are books in the home. Reading to children is important but not sufficient; children benefit from it, some quite a lot, but it neither obviates the role of instruction nor vaccinates against dyslexia. Children who are read to until the cow jumps over the moon can still have difficulty becoming readers." (*Language at the speed of sight*, p. 114)

Louisa Moats (2020) notes the importance of classroom instruction in preventing reading failure: "the tragedy here is that most reading failure is unnecessary. We now know that classroom teaching itself, when it includes a range of research-based components and practices, can prevent and mitigate reading difficulty. Although home factors do influence how well and how soon students read, informed classroom instruction that targets specific language, cognitive, and reading skills beginning in kindergarten enhances success for all but a very small percentage of students with learning disabilities or severe dyslexia. Researchers now estimate that 95 percent of all children can be taught to read by the end of first grade, with future achievement constrained only by students' reasoning and listening comprehension abilities."¹ (emphasis added).

The use of the superlative in the Panel's forthright statement that "parental involvement in a child's reading has been found to be the most important determinant of language and emergent literacy" is not actually borne out by the study cited to support the statement. The study is now over 25 years old, and while it did support the rollout of pre-school reading campaigns, the study itself did not make such superlative claims. It includes statements such as "book reading is not just a minor part of a literate environment but rather a main condition for developing the knowledge necessary for eventual success in reading acquisition" (note that book reading is considered "a" main condition, not "the" main condition). Further, "this result supports our hypothesis that book reading is part of a whole range of characteristics which are all indicative of a literate environment, and that book reading is a central aspect" (again, book reading is *part* of a whole range of characteristics, and "a" central aspect, not "the" central aspect). "Book reading is as strong a predictor [but not a *stronger* predictor] of reading achievement as is phonemic awareness" and, finally, "in spite of the accumulated evidence, we take the position that more and better research is needed to determine the conditions under which Storybook reading is most beneficial. At this point, we do not want to conclude that parent-preschooler reading should be encouraged unconditionally." This paper, then, seems to be less than solid support for the over-zealous (and actually quite vague) claim that "parental involvement in a child's reading has been found to be the most important determinant of language and emergent literacy".

Ten years later, it was noted that "a growing number of investigations have emphasized that the home literacy environment should not be identified solely with shared reading or any other single measure (e.g. Burgess et al., 2002; Frijters, Barron, & Brunello, 2000; Leseman & de Jong, 1998; Lonigan, 1994; Payne et al., 1994; Sénéchal & Lefevre, 2002; Storch & Whitehurst, 2001)." (Phillips, BM & Lonigan, CJ, 2005, "Social Correlates of Emergent Literacy")

For a less dated and more holistic review of the literature on the home literacy environment, we recommend Hamilton, LG & Hayiou-Thomas, ME (2022) "The foundations of literacy". They similarly note that "a substantial body of research has linked aspects of the home literacy environment (HLE) to precursor skills for literacy and thus, indirectly, to reading outcomes." However, they also note an attenuation of effects of HLE by the parents' own skills, the primacy of language quality over quantity (in turn likely impacted by SES), genetic factors playing a role, and

¹ <https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/moats.pdf>

shared reading *not* having a predictive role in a child's ability to decode text. They note "it is not clear that shared reading alone boosts children's early reading skills. In general, shared book reading is more often a context for *meaning-related*, rather than *code-related*, home literacy input... ..unlike vocabulary, grammatical, and narrative skills, the acquisition of alphabetic knowledge depends on explicit instruction." Front-loading the responsibility for literacy onto parents by making overblown claims about the primacy of parental involvement in home reading is a gross oversimplification which downplays the importance of explicit instruction at school, and subtly shifts responsibility from the DECYP onto parents.

Recalling the above observation about parents being accused of not reading to their children, we also draw the Panel's attention to these authors' statement that "several such studies suggest that the amount and quality of shared reading, code-related interactions, availability of print materials in the home, and children's interest in reading do not differ systematically between children with and without family risk of dyslexia (Caglar-Ryeng et al., 2020; Laakso et al., 1999; van Bergan et al., 2014)". It is worth noting that – despite the similarities in HLE – the former cohort are the children who will likely require some of the most skilled and most resource-intensive instruction during school years. Dyslexia is well-known to be a multifaceted condition and these facets can each occur on their own spectrum (e.g. rapid automatic naming ability and phonological memory as just two examples), so while estimates for the prevalence of dyslexia are as high as one in five students, the number of students with dyslexia-like difficulties who fall marginally outside meeting diagnostic criteria, is much higher again. The DECYP can therefore not realistically plan to outsource this large cohort's requirements for expert and explicit instruction to parents nor campaign for parents to 'read them into literacy' prior to schooling.

CODE REaD fully supports the promotion of literacy as a whole of community activity and recognises and values the substantial and seminal effects of the home literacy environment. However, the responsibility for producing children who can read and write – regardless of their home literacy environment (or any other odds stacked against them) – rests squarely with the DECYP. This is the public good premised by a taxpayer-funded education system.

The School Years (5-17 years-old)

The report states that "The information presented to the Panel was that current practices, such as balanced literacy approaches and the three cueing systems do not work effectively for all students."

CODE REaD urges the Panel to 'come clean' with this understatement. Three cueing is not just ineffective, it is harmful. The precise origin of the approach is unclear but its theoretical basis is unquestionably at odds with what reading researchers have known for decades: the hallmark of a good reader is the ability to read a word in isolation, with no surrounding text to provide narrative, semantic, or syntactical context, and no pictures to provide clues (Ehri, LC, 2005, "Development of Sight Word Reading: Phases and Findings").

Reading researchers are clear in their condemnation of three cueing, noting that it takes beginning readers' attention off the very thing they need to attend to – the word – and that "this strategy, rather than supporting the child's developing word-identification system, encourages guessing." (Perfetti, C & Helfer, A, 2022, "Progress in Reading Science: Word Identification, Comprehension, and Universal Perspectives")

The approach needs to be called out for what it is – ideology which delays decoding mastery – rather than treated as another 'option' available to teachers. Unless teachers are informed of the

harmful effects of three cueing, they will continue to use it, as evidenced by the Panel's own statement that "there was some opposition expressed to only adopting Science of Reading in Tasmania, suggesting that there should be options for teaching methods".

The "What this tells us about the Secondary School setting" section includes the necessity for teacher professional development for evidence-based literacy skills, while in an apparent oversight this is omitted from the "What this tells us about the Primary School setting" section, where it's obviously more critical.

Question Two: What are the three main things we should prioritise doing in:

The School Years (5-17 years-old)

CODE REaD advocates for improvement in **reading and writing** instruction as the number one priority for schools. While 'alternative literacies' are an important part of modern life (and indeed important compensations for those without reading or writing skills), we position the conventional notions of literacy as the most important and empowering core competencies that a person in a highly literate society can acquire. Employment advertisements/applications, tax returns, bank account applications, Centrelink/NDIS applications/reporting, car registration documentation, driver's licence tests, road signs, grant applications, policy documents, legal documents such as wills, employment awards, court summonses, mortgages, contracts, legal advice and legislation itself, are all yet to be released on YouTube. As such, any educational system that lowers the priority of reading and writing on the premise of the availability of alternative literacies does society a gross disservice.

Indeed, despite the Panel's broad definition of literacy ("when the word 'literacy' is used in this paper, it refers to the full breadth of literacy... ..not just reading and writing"), there is an inherent and self-contradictory acknowledgement of the primacy of text-based skills in the Panel's later claim that "parental involvement in a child's reading has been found to be the most important determinant of language and emergent literacy". We are unaware of research that links parental involvement in a child's reading with the child's later ability to use a digital camera to create an Instagram travelogue – the Panel has apparently made something of a Freudian slip.

CODE REaD advocates that mandating a **science-informed** approach to reading and writing instruction is the single most important priority for DECYP. It is important for us to clarify that this is **not** just because we advocate for dyslexics and their families, but because this investment will offer the best return for all schoolchildren. Dyslexic children are simply 'the canaries in the coalmine', those who suffer most from the balanced literacy approach, while other students will also experience less evident struggles and less evident opportunity costs.

The Panel's paper appears slightly 'confused' about whether explicit instruction is something that's only required for intervention and for those with specific literacy challenges, or whether it should be the default approach for all: some sections of the paper appear to suggest the former while some state the latter, which leaves the paper open to interpretation on this matter.

It should be made clear by the Panel that a Response To Intervention approach in reading and writing instruction can reduce the need for differentiation of *content* by adopting a differentiated (i.e. tiered) approach to *delivery*. For example, tier 1, standard classroom instruction, should be

explicit, direct, systematic, sequential, and cumulative, with the content devised by trained teachers. Those children who are identified as needing more time to achieve mastery of the lesson's content can be included in tier 2, which may simply involve more repetition of facets of the same lesson in a smaller, quieter, group, perhaps delivered by a suitably trained TA. Tier 3 could involve a variety of multisensory approaches and further repetition of the same content, and would be delivered by the most expert staff. But, wherever possible, the goal would be for mastery of the same curriculum in each tier.

The Workforce section suggests *every* teacher in *every* school should receive literacy PD *every* year. While this sounds aspirational, the basics of systematic reading and writing instruction can be covered in one to two weeks. Rather than setting a mandatory requirement that every teacher in service receives literacy training annually – whether it's needed or not – it would likely be a better use of resources to maintain a register of competencies, and for ASTs to be kept abreast (by, for example, AERO) of any important developments in the literature which have translational implications for classroom instruction. ASTs could then determine the need for further staff training.

The "quality assured list of service providers who deliver evidence informed professional learning" sensibly proposed by the Panel should be open to public scrutiny. Existing contracts should be reviewed in light of this list. CODE REaD is aware that DECYP has current engagements with consultants who openly undermine the utility of science-informed approaches, and many such consultants also claim to offer "evidence-based", "explicit" and "systematic" instruction. This will be confusing for staff who do not yet have enough exposure to science-based instruction to be able to tell the difference between those programs which are genuinely science-based and those which aren't and are only misapplying the terminology. This will undermine the Panel's efforts to move toward science-based approaches. The persistence of these pseudoscientific approaches is evidenced by the curriculum decisions within La Trobe University's Science of Language and Reading Lab which is, as of this year, training pre-service teachers in the history, theoretical roots, and failures of Balanced Literacy precisely because it is based on "theoretical zombies that cannot be stopped by conventional weapons such as empirical disconfirmation, leaving them free to roam the educational landscape." (Seidenberg, M 2017, *Language at the speed of sight*, p. 217)

As a matter of principle, it should not be a cost to the taxpayer to upskill teachers in knowledge that has been in the public domain for decades. DECYP should therefore also clearly state employment selection criteria related to literacy instruction skills – i.e. giving preference to applicants *already* trained in science-based approaches. This will become particularly important once recalcitrant teachers from the Tasmanian Catholic school sector (who, CODE REaD has been advised, have been exhorted to 'get with the science or get out') consider changing to the public sector.

Question Three: Are there any data sets not considered in this paper that should be used to monitor literacy achievement in:

The School Years (5-17 years-old)

The DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) assessment was recommended in an earlier phase of community consultation, and was unfortunately erroneously included in a graph of literacy "programs" in Paper 2 "What we heard" (p. 17).

DIBELS is not a literacy program. It offers a quick diagnostic measure of reading fluency and is a preferred evaluation for a number of well-respected science-based practitioners/organisations (e.g. SPELD SA², Think Forward Educators³, Hansberry Educational Consulting⁴, Jocelyn Seamer Education⁵), as well as being widely used in school settings. South Australia's education department recommends the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency assessment tool for monitoring the progression of reading development for its year 2 students.

Like any assessment, DIBELS has limitations, but is a very useful tool to include in an assessment suite.

Question Five: Are there any other comments you would like to make?

The "what this tells us" section on "addressing stigma" suggests campaigns should "recognise and address barriers to participation".

CODE REaD members know the relief from stigma that recognition of educational shortcomings offers. An illiterate adult who learns to read and realises that they are not 'stupid' but rather a casualty of ineffective school instruction, is one whose sense of failure has a chance of being lifted. Neuroscientist and reading researcher Mark Seidenberg notes of the adoption of whole language (from which most of the current non-science approaches are direct descendants) in schools, that it was "an unregulated experiment on millions of children who did not know they were participants" (2017, *Language at the speed of sight*, p. 217). Any genuine attempt to reduce stigma around reading failure must include the acknowledgment of DECYP responsibility for many such instructional casualties.

The Paper makes reference to "nonsense words". This phrase tends to be a lightning rod for criticism and the mischaracterisation that students are being taught and screened on useless information. We recommend the adoption of the more neutral phrase, "pseudowords".

² <https://www.speldsa.org.au/DIBELS-science-of-reading>

³ <https://thinkforwardeducators.org/events/vanessa-basilone-dibels-oct2022>

⁴ <https://www.hansberryec.com.au/copy-of-playberry-tier1-3>

⁵ <https://www.jocelynseamereducation.com/blog/46901-time-to-break-up-with-running-records>