

**This submission to the enquiry into Education and Training Workforce: Schools concerns the need for mandatory pre-service training and ongoing professional development in regard to learning disabilities including dyslexia.**

There is an urgent need for an informed and responsible education policy that recognizes and gives targeted support for students who have learning disabilities including dyslexia. These are children who have average to very high general ability but have neurologically based processing difficulties that cause significant difficulty with reading, spelling and sometimes mathematics (Prior, 1996) and this difficulty is highly resistant to change despite skilled teaching interventions (National Joint Council on Learning Disabilities, 2005; Rose, 2009). According to a recent UK government commissioned report into dyslexia, approximately 8% of children have dyslexia (Rose, 2009). Rather than fulfilling their potential, this significant group of students is currently at risk of school behaviour problems, school dropout (Deshler, 2005; Scanlon & Mellard, 2002), juvenile delinquency (Ahrens, DuBois, Lozano & Richardson, 2010; Svetaz, Ireland, & Blum, 2000), social isolation (Bryan, Burstein, & Ergul, 2004; Svetaz et al., 2000; Wong & Donahue, 2002), and depression (Ahrens et al., 2010; Wilson, Armstrong, Furrie, & Walcott, 2009). This situation is of national economic and social significance.

Currently inclusion of the study of learning disabilities varies greatly across Australia. Many teachers complete their entire training either without ever having heard of the phenomenon or having a very limited understanding of what it means, how to identify the signs of it, and what effective strategies are available to assist these students (Louden et al, 2000). The USA, UK, and Canada all have mandated initial teacher training in learning disabilities (Firth, 2010). We in Australia are lagging behind and there is an urgent need for reform on the issue (New South Wales Parliamentary Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues, 2003).

With identification and appropriate support such students can make a highly valuable contribution to the community. Knowledge of effective responses for students who have learning disabilities is available. All teachers need to become informed about the lifelong nature and prevalence of learning disabilities, diagnosis paths, skilled literacy intervention, use of print minimised mediums to allow equal access to learning and building of critical adaptive coping skills (Firth, 2010). The national Dyslexia Work Party Report to Hon Bill Shorten, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services (2010) included the following recommendations:

**Recommendation 5 - Pre-service training**

All teacher-training syllabi should include:

- Training in evidence-based reading instruction, shown through rigorous research to minimise the impact of dyslexia;
- Training in early screening / identification of students at risk of long term literacy problems, including dyslexia; and,
- Training in effective, research-based strategies that support students with dyslexia including: resilience development, use of non-print mediums, and presence of whole school dyslexia policies. (p.9)

**Recommendation 7 – In-Service Training**

- Professional development programs should be developed for all practising classroom teachers to assist them to identify and support students at risk of dyslexia. (p.9)

I strongly urge this enquiry to highlight and work to address this situation. Mandatory teacher education in learning disabilities including dyslexia will significantly and positively affect the success of lives of many children and economic advantage to the country will be significant.

Nola Firth B.A., Dip ED., G.D.S.E., M.Ed. PhD.

Senior researcher, Centre for Adolescent Health, Royal Childrens Hospital and Murdoch Childrens Research Institute

M: International Academy of Research into Learning Disabilities

Churchill Fellow

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