

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2005-2006 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome: 1

Output Group: 1.3 – Assistance for quality teaching and learning

DEST Question No. E112_06

Senator Carr provided in writing.

Refers to DEST Question No E436_05.

Question:

Literacy Review

a) What conclusion would DEST draw if someone incorrectly answered the following question:

A pronounceable group of letters containing a vowel is a:

- (a) a phoneme
- (b) a grapheme
- (c) a syllable
- (d) a morpheme

Would you think it was reasonable to conclude that someone incorrectly answering this question did not know what a syllable was?

Or would it be more accurate to say that they might know what a syllable was but not be able to define it in the way it described in the question?

What about someone who incorrectly answered this question:

How many speech sounds are in the word 'box'?

- (a) one
- (b) two
- (c) three
- (d) four

Would it be fair to conclude that they couldn't identify the sounds in a word?

b) Is the department aware of research done by Ruth Fielding-Barnsley and Nola Purdie of the Queensland University of Technology on the metalinguistics in the process of learning to read?

c) Has any advice been provided to the Minister's office on this research?

If so, what form did this advice take and when was it given?

d) Is the department aware that the researcher involved has publicly indicated that the Ministers characterisation of her research as:

"Half of the final-year teaching graduates, undergraduates and early career teachers don't know what a syllable is and more so, three-quarters apparently can't identify the sounds in a word"

is a misrepresentation, stating

"It's not correct to say that half didn't know what a syllable was. It's completely different to being able to explain it.

And that she is concerned that her research is being used to unfairly denigrate teachers.

Answer:

- a) The questions referred to are two of ten multiple-choice questions used by Dr Ruth Fielding-Barnsley and Dr Nola Purdie in research reported in a paper titled 'Teachers attitude to and knowledge of metalinguistics in the process of learning to read' (Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education 33(1) March 2005). The ten questions were used to examine teachers' knowledge of the structure of the English language at both word and sound levels. Dr Fielding-Barnsley and Dr Purdie surveyed 93 pre-service teachers; 209 general teachers; and 38 special education teachers and on the base of these questions, and a survey instrument that explored attitudes to early reading and spelling. The researchers report that results of the survey indicate a positive attitude to but poor knowledge of metalinguistics (including the structure of the English language at both word and sound levels) in the process of learning to read.
- b) Yes.
- c) An information briefing was provided to the Minister in November 2004.
- d) The Department is aware that the researchers have made some public statements about the Minister's references to their research.