

The Secretariat
Commonwealth Senate Employment Workplace Relations
and Reference Committee

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My submission is limited by the short response time factor.

I put before your committee opinions gained from my experience as a mother of a dyslexic son, a retrained teacher and as an adult Dyslexic.

As a member of SPELD N.S.W. I seek assurance that we, as an association, have not laboured in vain for the past thirty years.

Dyslexia, a specified difficulty, is NOT a medical condition, It is an educational problem. For the dyslexic, the difficulty is a life sentence. Its existence needs to be accepted as fact. The primary attention for learning difficulty at school is the educationalist's responsibility. All teachers and the general public need to know these facts. Functional literacy is the right of every child in our compulsory education system.

Brief response in answer to your Terms of Reference

(1) (a) (ii)

Dyslexia is the most common Specific Learning Difficulty (SLD). It is not currently identified or assessed in New South Wales schools. Dyslexia has been and is Internationally recognised by groups such as the British Dyslexic Association for over thirty years.

(1) (a) (iv)

Even with early detection and intervention, while at school, on-going support and reviews of the pupils' self-management techniques are required. At present the professional awareness of teachers regarding SLD is not as extensive as it ought to be. Dyslexia is the most common SLD. Regrettably, the official N.S.W. Education Authorities seem to prevent teachers and school counsellors from acknowledging that dyslexic children exist.

(1) (a) (v)

Funding needs more flexibility in allocation to include forms of SLD not currently recognised in N.S.W. by the Education Department. The most paramount form of SLD is termed by the Authority as a Significant Learning Difficulty but never acknowledged as Dyslexia.

(1) (a) (vi)

Foundations for learning are important. What is developed and built on the basic footing is vital Attention to SLD does not require obscene amounts of money. Appropriate teacher training, at all levels of schooling, could effect improved outcomes for all learners. Professional rivalry, lack of humility, and absence of sincere empathy, stand in the way of progress for our children.

In reality, we the entire community, need a perspective of how long we use basic skills and how they develop and are modified over time. Imposing time and/or age restrictions on how long this early learning requires is the principal cause of too much early failure to learn. Both children and teachers are not encouraged to keep trying to develop these basic skills.

(1) (a) (vii)

Teacher training and professional development does not provide the opportunity for constructive evaluation, by lecturers and teachers, to identify the essentials for a successful outcome for all children. The essential teaching strategies must be identified and then included into curriculum in order to improve the functional reading and writing of all pupils in schools.

Liaison between teacher trainers and practising teachers (both classroom and specialised) is needed. The aim being to evaluate effective strategy, which must be included in the curriculum. Such essential improvements to teaching functional reading and writing have already been identified in the current N.S.W. Support Documents. Unfortunately these are not read and implemented by teachers previously trained under the old exclusive and opposing methods of teaching reading and writing. Teachers are so over-committed with accountability and other classroom responsibility they do not universally have confidence or promotion to use this latest direction.

(1) (a) (viii)

With the way the Justice System appears to be expanding its boundaries in matters for litigation, it might not be prudent to dismiss a possibility of some future basis for litigation under the 1992 Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act.

(b)

In part, what I have already briefly stated responds to this. The fact that the Education Department does not recognise Dyslexia effectively prevents school counsellors and teachers attending to these under-achieving and unhappy children.

Please find enclosed a copy of my response to the N.S.W Legislative Council.

Yours sincerely

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Awareness information to support current representation of a member of SPELD NSW

SPELD NSW was founded in 1968 to seek help for desperate people. We mothers and our children could NOT wait for local research. Our children needed educational help there and then.

Thirty years ago I didn't wait. In 1970, as a qualified 3-year trained teacher (1945-47, Sydney Teachers College), I undertook the initial NSW training course to become a specialist remedial/resource teacher.

SPELD members found enough international and local information then to make a difference. Facts were known, researched and worthy of application. Practical educational information has always been available from the British Dyslexia Association. A copy of the *Indications of Dyslexia* was again published in the SPELD newsletter in May 2001.

All parents had, and still have, to understand how difficult and how long their support will be required to "save" and help their SLD children. Many parents never know that their child can be helped. Never an easy task, we too can, and we did, succeed because we cared. We must always care.

My sincere thanks to the late Yvonne Stewart, AM, for her perseverance and dedication. Without SPELD NSW and AUSPELD, we mothers, grandmothers and our children would have been abandoned and completely ignored. Thankfully, these associations continue to support and assist many aware families, professional educators and other persons to help our dyslexic children and adults.

Currently my own grandchildren require this understanding. The TOLL transport family of Newcastle, NSW provides a living history of the specific needs of dyslexic SLD children.

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