

The Committee Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations & Education Committee

Submission From

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Investment in education is not just about the competence of each individual; it is about the prosperity of a nation. An educated workforce is an innovative and productive workforce.

Current efforts to raise school retention numbers in years 11 & 12 are to be applauded. However it must be recognised that unless students have the necessary skill base, that is, students are able to read and write adequately, then the initiatives will be of little benefit to either the student, the college or the nation.

We have remedial courses in universities to aid students with poor literacy skills coming from secondary colleges.

We have remedial courses in secondary colleges to aid students with poor literacy skills coming from high schools.

We have remedial courses in high schools to aid students with poor literacy skills coming from primary schools.

We have remedial courses in upper primary to aid students with poor literacy skills coming from the infant sector.

For years researchers have been aware that educators, mostly those in powerful bureaucratic positions, are refusing to acknowledge hard scientific evidence that a traditional phonics approach to early reading instruction is best practice by a country mile.

In the early stages it must also be a phonics only approach as

- a) Whole word guessing and phonics are competitive at this stage & not complementary.
- b) The analytic phonics associated with the whole word approach is a watered down phonics.
- c) With traditional phonics each new piece of learning is built on previous learning, it is then practiced and further consolidated. Whole word relies on incidental teaching according to the student's needs at the time. Whole word lacks rigor, it represents less than adequate teaching practice. Assessment is rendered well-nigh impossible, making accountability all but non-existent.

We have reached a stage where whole language proponents concede that it is useful for children to learn the sounds of the letters of the alphabet to 'aid them in guessing'. There has also been concession made for the more common double vowels such as 'oo' and 'ee'. If we can extend the concept to acknowledging that blending sounds together is a very useful skill the effort of learning letter sounds becomes worthwhile. This in turn allows us to 'chunk' syllables. If we can later accurately distinguish the difference between words like 'complicate' & 'confiscate' - we are on the path towards fixing the problem at its source.

Teachers when given the opportunity to teach traditional phonics usually love it, because it works. The students love it because they experience success. The parents love it because the children are happy. The community loves it because they have a competent workforce.

Let's build a better future by using best teaching practice in the early years.