

## **SPELD NSW Submission**

### **Productivity Commission Review of the Education Evidence Base**

Specific Learning Difficulties Association (NSW) (SPELD NSW) is a Public Benevolent Institution founded in 1968, whose mission is to provide advice and services to children and adults with specific learning difficulties and those who teach, work with and care for them.

SPELD NSW acknowledges the importance of the collection of data which will inform best evidence based teaching and learning practice. The development of best practice is particularly important to the education of students with specific learning difficulties (SLD). There is an apparent conflict between the various views held on how to best teach literacy skills to these students. The importance of the collection of relevant data in producing an evidence base has to be acknowledged. The use of this data can lead to a better informed evaluation of some current teaching practices which are seen as being in conflict with evidence based research.

The people requesting advice and assistance from SPELD NSW are in the main, concerned with how to improve the literacy skills of those students with Dyslexia or Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder. It is clear that there are some literacy teaching methods in use, that are not supported by research and are being promoted by some departments, schools and teachers and others with vested commercial interests. To overcome this situation, it is considered important that a data base be established on the number students presenting with SLD, the nature of the SLD and an evaluation of learning outcomes against teaching method used. Preschools should be involved in the data base and the situation with those students leaving before completing year 12 should also be included. NAPLAN and PISA results have an important role in monitoring student progress and can contribute to the data base. Gaps in learning over time need to be evaluated from a wider perspective and include socially and economically deprived students, as well as, those with SLD.

In the process of providing support to those people requesting advice and assistance, SPELD NSW maintains a record of the nature of the inquiries received and recommended actions to be taken. It would be of considerable benefit to be able to gain information on the usefulness of the advice given.

It is essential that the needs and involvement of parents in their child's learning be taken into consideration. They should be assisted in gaining an understanding of SLDs and of the most appropriate learning strategy for their student.

Health professionals may also be involved with remedial programs. A data base of their involvement could contribute to the evidence base.

It would appear that there is some conflict between the findings of evidence based research and early teacher training, departmental policy development and implementation, school and classroom activities and parent engagement. The development of a data base to monitor the degree of disconnect at these levels of education provision would be of value.

Classroom teachers in particular, need an understanding of the sources, characteristics and use of evidence based evidence in their teaching practice. It is suggested that teachers, particularly early teachers, receive some instruction in research methodology; its role and use in achieving quality evidence based education outcomes.

A holistic approach to the education evidence base, would also involve the collection of the data involving young offenders in Juvenile Justice Centres. Many of these inmates are there because of having a SLD. A data base could assist in identifying the educational background to their offence and identification of rehabilitation efforts using evidence based education to meet their learning needs.

A further valuable addition to the education evidence base can be achieved by ensuring that all education professionals and involved members of the public are aware of and have access to relevant evidence based and peer reviewed publications. A record of evidence based publications such as AUSPELD's "Understanding learning difficulties. A practical guide for teachers" and "Understanding learning difficulties. A guide for parents" would make a significant contribution to a more informed understanding of learning difficulties and how best to overcome them.