Evaluation of SPELD in New Zealand

Interim report of the Phase One data prepared for SPELD NZ

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Executive summary

This report presents the findings from an evaluation carried out in 2009 of the impact of SPELD in New Zealand, and is the first phase of a larger study. This phase presents the perceptions of SPELD participants including SPELD assessors and teachers, classroom teachers of SPELD students, the students themselves, and their parents.

The focus of the first phase of the evaluation was concerned with:

- Shifts in achievement and attitudes to learning for students participating in SPELD;
- Components of the SPELD teaching programme that were perceived to contribute to positive shifts in student outcomes; and
- SPELD's effectiveness in building sector capability.

Data were collected from two clusters of 20 schools in total, in each of the three major cities in New Zealand. The data collection methods included:

- focus groups with -
  - SPELD teachers (12 in total);
  - classroom teachers (7 in total);
  - parents of SPELD students (19 in total); and
- interviews with 36 students and 3 assessors at case study schools.

Key findings from Phase One of the evaluation were:

- Parents believed most SPELD students lost self esteem and confidence in their early years of schooling before schools recognised there was a problem.
- SPELD assessors and teachers reported many classroom teachers lacked knowledge of symptoms and consequences of SLDs, and most schools lacked current understanding about the expertise SPELD offers.
- SPELD teachers and assessors reported that for most students, achievement progress is slow with little obvious improvement for some time; for some there is rapid improvement and large shifts in achievement; and for others there is uneven progress, e.g., reading levels may increase while spelling remains static.
- Participants perceived SPELD teachers' abilities to turn around students' low self esteem and raise confidence led to positive shifts in attitudes towards learning for the majority of students and contributed to students' increased motivation, which led to sustained efforts in learning.
- Most students reported a positive relationship with their SPELD teacher who believed in their abilities to learn, and who gave them strategies to overcome their learning disabilities.

- Some older SPELD students claimed they were self conscious about needing SPELD interventions and were reluctant to attend, but others were reported by SPELD teachers to return to SPELD of their own accord at secondary school when they realized they still needed help.
- Strengths of the SPELD teaching programme perceived to contribute to positive student outcomes were SPELD teachers' specialist knowledge and experience of teaching students with SLDs; interventions based on data, and tailored to student's individual needs; one-to-one tuition; and focused learning times.
- Components that would strengthen SPELD's impact were perceived to be more frequent tuition; increasing knowledge about dyslexia in the school sector; and strengthening partnerships between SPELD teachers, classroom teachers, parents and assessors, to ensure shared understandings.
- While there were reports of regional variations, most SPELD teachers and assessors were impressed by the quality of initial training and the continued professional development they received.
- One concern about building sector capability was seen to be the low financial reimbursement of SPELD teachers not attracting enough younger teachers to replace the present workforce of 'older women'.

Phase Two

In Phase Two of the project, quantitative data will be obtained from surveys of:

- schools; and
- SPELD teachers.

Student achievement data will also be collected from SPELD assessors.

Data will also be gathered about student self esteem from parents of SPELD students.

This combined approach will enable an evaluation of the big picture of SPELD in New Zealand, as well as a closer examination of various issues and points of view that have emerged.

1. Introduction

This report provides the first phase of an evaluation of SPELD in New Zealand, carried out in 2009 by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER), for SPELD NZ Inc. This chapter provides background information on SPELD NZ and describes the context and purpose of the evaluation. It outlines the research questions and describes the research design, including the methodology, sampling and data analysis.

Background information about SPELD

SPELD NZ, the Specific Learning Disabilities Federation, is a not-for-profit organisation which was set up in 1971 to help children who are not realising their educational potential because of various specific learning disabilities. The SPELD website says "these are children who learn differently", and it is estimated that ten percent of the population may have these learning problems. SPELD has four main objectives which are advocacy, assessment, tutoring, and family support. The organisation's primary goal is to work with students with Special Learning Disabilities (SLDs), building their self esteem and skills and strategies, assisting them to be more engaged with school and so more likely to achieve.

SPELD NZ has 29 member associations nationwide. SPELD teachers provide assistance to people of all ages with learning problems, notably dyslexia. Other conditions include dyscalculia, dyspraxia, aphasia, attention deficits (ADD and ADHD) and various degrees of autism. Qualified SPELD assessors first identify the student's areas of strength and weakness, through the use of psychometric assessment. The assessors undertake a comprehensive five day training programme which consists of three days training with the Woodcock-Johnson III (WJ-III) test followed by two days training on the SPELD approach to specific learning disorders. The W-JII consists of two distinct co-normed batteries; the WJ-III Tests of Achievement and the WJ-III Tests of Cognitive Abilities. Together these provide a comprehensive measure of both general ability, specific cognitive abilities, oral language, and academic achievement.

SPELD is accredited to teach courses for teachers and parents which are NZQA approved under the provisions of the Education Act 1989. Specially trained teachers plan remedial programmes based on the SPELD assessment. The tutoring is one-to-one and it is focused, at least initially, upon the specific weaknesses identified in the assessment. The working definition approved at the SPELD NZ Annual General Meeting in 2003 states:

> An individual with Specific Learning Disabilities is average or above average in some intellectual areas and below in others. This is due not to a lack of general ability nor a failure of effort or normal teaching. The individual's problems may be organic and may show a

> familial tendency. The effects of the Specific Learning Disability may be seen in reading (Dyslexia), numbers (Dyscalculia), writing and spelling etc. Assessment may reveal difficulties with underlying processes such as spatial relationships, sequential processing, memory, attention, auditory and/or visual perception.[1]

Qualifying as a SPELD teacher involves holding a recognised New Zealand teaching certificate and completing the SPELD NZ Certificate course in specific learning disabilities. This can be done either as an 80 hour face-to-face course with a further 320 hours of self-managed study, or as a 400 hour (6 month) Online distance course.

The course covers topics such as emotional development and SLD; learning difficulties and specific learning disabilities; neurology; reading, spelling, writing and maths with SLD; remedial theories; ADD and ADHD; anatomy of the eye and ear; assessment and lesson planning; child development and exceptional children; sensory integration and motor development; teaching learners with SLD from children to adults; technology with SLD; and history and organization of SPELD.[2]

SPELD teachers are also required to undertake on-going professional development to keep up to date with the fast growing research evidence in this field, by completing 36 credits of professional development over three years. SPELD NZ organises annual conferences and brings out overseas specialists to these conferences.

SPELD's teaching intervention philosophy is based on the understanding that the underlying cause of dyslexia and other SLDs is neurological, for which there is no complete "cure". Strategies are taught to ameliorate and assist the student to manage their difficulties. Teaching is designed to address underlying difficulties, such as poor auditory discrimination. Activities involve the repetition of skills and strategies in varied ways, because students with SLDs are understood to need more practice to master a skill. In the reading and writing area SPELD provides a systematic phonics programme designed to address cognitive processing difficulties. SPELD acknowledges that not all students learn the same way and take a multisensory approach to learning.

Operational context

SPELD NZ is an organisation which has grown in New Zealand in the past 37 years. In March 2007 nearly 1900 students participated in SPELD, coached by 442 teachers and tested by 30 assessors. It is estimated that nearly 2000 SPELD assessments are carried out annually.

SPELD teachers operate in different ways. Most SPELD teachers teach from within their own homes, tutoring students for an hour before or after school, usually once a week. Some teach from a school base, withdrawing students for 30–60 minutes a week during class time. In these schools

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[1] Taken from SPELD NZ's website on 31/3/09: www.SPELD.org.nz

[2] Taken from SPELD NZ's website on 31/3/09: www.SPELD.org.nz

the SPELD teacher is given space to teach and permission to withdraw children. This arrangement does not involve any financial transactions between the SPELD teacher and the school. Parents pay the SPELD teacher for the tutoring time. Most SPELD teachers charge between $30–40 per hour.

Instruction with a student is one-to-one and is tailored to meet the specific learning needs of each student based on data from the assessment and the recommendations of the SPELD assessor. Lessons include a range of activities, put together from the following:

- **Phonological Awareness:** Oral activities to develop word awareness, syllable awareness, and letter sound awareness.
- **Phonics:** Every child being taught for reading or writing is taken through a systematic phonics programme. Once phonological awareness is well under way, this is part of every lesson and is linked to spelling, writing, and reading text.
- **Auditory Perception:** Where a deficiency is noted in the assessment, activities focus on auditory discrimination, memory etc. This is closely linked to phonological awareness. Activities in following one, two, and three step instructions may be given.
- **Visual Perception:** Where a deficiency is noted in the assessment, activities focus on visual discrimination, memory, figure-ground, eye tracking, etc.
- **Revision of previous teaching:** This occurs particularly in phonological awareness and phonics. It is often in the form of rapid response to flash cards or a game, for example, to practise short vowel sounds, or rapid naming of initial or final consonants.
- **Reading:** Learning irregular high frequency words. Using phonics rules to work out regular words. Reading text using phonics skills plus meaning and syntax clues. Strategies for reading; monitoring own work, re-reading, cross checking.
- **Writing skills:** Handwriting with letter formation, size, slope, and consistency taught and reinforced. Using mind maps to plan a piece of writing. Writing a sentence or two quickly. Practice in stretching out the words, counting the number of sounds in a word and representing each with letters.
- **Spelling:** Learning new spelling rules; applying these rules; learning irregular words. Using known words to spell new words—word families.
- **Comprehension:** Retelling the story; answering questions including factual, inferential, evaluative, etc.
- **Maths:** basic facts drill or games; counting; learning strategies. Mostly based on number knowledge and the four processes of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

Purpose and strategic importance of the evaluation

Up until the present time there has been no research conducted or commissioned into SPELD interventions. This evaluation is set within a context of significant organisational change as SPELD NZ is seeking to move forward professionally by developing a stronger evidence base both for its programmes and for its culture and systems. SPELD's interest is in building a robust

evidence base for its programme, therefore research into its work with students with learning disabilities is required for three reasons:

- A stronger evidence base of student assessment data is needed to establish SPELD's internal and external credibility and strengthen productive relationships with the education sector in general;
- Evidence about the conditions associated with the greatest shifts in student learning is needed to inform SPELD practices, as is student, parent, teacher, and tutor, and assessor experiences of the interventions used in SPELD; and
- As SPELD evolves from a perceived 'cottage industry'[3] to a recognised professional body, it needs consistent and reliable models that can be appropriately modified for its own internal monitoring.

The evaluation will provide insights into SPELD's role and contribution as an education organisation within New Zealand and provide information that SPELD could draw upon as it develops its self evaluation and monitoring systems.

The evaluation is timely in view of the MOE's current interest in early interventions to address achievement issues in literacy and numeracy. In 2007/8 the MOE officially recognised dyslexia and is developing a range of resources to assist teachers and parents of children with dyslexia. The MOE definition, drawn on components of some existing definitions as identified in the *Literature Review: An International Perspective on Dyslexia* (MOE[4]) is:

> Dyslexia is a spectrum of specific learning difficulties and is evident when accurate and/or fluent reading and writing skills, particularly phonological awareness, develop incompletely or with great difficulty. This may include difficulties with one or more of reading, writing, spelling, numeracy, or musical notation. These difficulties are persistent despite access to learning opportunities that are effective and appropriate for most other children.
>
> People with dyslexia can be found across the achievement spectrum and sometimes have a number of associated secondary characteristics which may also need to be addressed, such as difficulties with auditory and/or visual perception; planning and organising; short-term memory; motor skills or social interaction.
>
> People with dyslexia often develop compensatory strategies and these can disguise their difficulties. People with dyslexia can also develop compensatory strengths which can provide an opportunity to further advance their learning.
>
> Early identification followed by a systematic and sustained process of highly individualised, skilled teaching primarily focused on written language, with specialist support, is critical to enable learners to participate in the full range of social, academic, and other learning opportunities across all areas of the curriculum.

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[3] As cited in SPELD's RFP (2007, p. 4).

[4] Taken from: http://www.tki.org.nz/r/literacy_numeracy/pdf/literature-review.pdf on 20/4/09

The research questions

We co-developed the research questions with SPELD NZ. The research questions are:

1. What evidence is there of shifts in achievement for students who participate in SPELD?
2. What evidence is there of shifts in attitudes to learning for students who participate in SPELD?
3. What components of the SPELD teaching programme are perceived to contribute to positive shifts in student outcomes?
4. Do the shifts made by SPELD students differ according to student characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, or initial achievement levels?
5. Do the shifts made by SPELD students differ according to other conditions such as school characteristics, their SPELD teacher, or the process by which they are referred?
6. How effective are the activities designed by SPELD NZ to build sector capability (e.g., professional development, conferences) perceived to be?

Research design

This project uses a multi-method design involving both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection to enable a greater breadth of analysis than could be obtained in a single-method study (Yin, 1994; Creswell, 1994; Patton, 1990). The reliability and validity of this study will be strengthened through the triangulation of both methods and data (Patton, 1990, Hakim, 1987).

A formative evaluative approach has been adopted in this project, where the information analysed at each stage, helps to inform the next stage of the research. The four components to this evaluation include:

1. Case studies;
2. Surveys;
3. Analysis of student achievement data; and
4. Analysis of students' engagement/attitudes to school.

Structure of the evaluation

The project is conducted in two phases. Phase One of the evaluation addressed questions 1, 2, 3 and 6, using case studies. The Phase Two report will provide further data to answer these questions and will also address questions 1, 4 and 5.

This report covers Phase One only.

Methodology for Phase One

A qualitative methodology was used to collect data for this phase of the evaluation, from the case study fieldwork. A case study design is suited to situations in which it is not possible to separate the variables being studied from their context (Yin, 1994) and is as much concerned with processes as it is with products and outcomes. The case study methodology proved to be a useful way to gain a rich picture of the experiences of all those involved in SPELD, the contexts in which they work, the ways in which they work together, and their perceptions of SPELD practices.

Methods

Each case study was based on the SPELD teachers working in a cluster of near-by schools, the students, parents, and teachers they worked with; and an associated assessor. Six case studies were chosen from three cities. Case study participants were selected based on information provided by SPELD NZ. Each case study involved:

- Individual interviews with each student, at their own school;
- Focus group interviews held at a central location with:
  - the classroom teachers of these students;
  - the SPELD teachers of these students; and
  - the parents of these students.
- An interview with the SPELD assessor of many of the students.

A copy of the student interview questions are appended as Appendix 1; and the parent focus group questions as Appendix 2. Assessor questions are Appendix 3; SPELD teachers are Appendix 4 and classroom teachers are Appendix 5.

Participants

We used a purposive sampling approach to invite participants for this project. A sample of SPELD teachers from three cities, who were recommended by SPELD National Office, were invited to participate in the study. We then invited a sample of the students and their parents and classroom teachers associated with each SPELD teacher, from schools that were clustered geographically close to each other.

Table 1 shows the number of participants in the study.

Table 1 **Participants at cluster schools**

City	Cluster schools	SPELD assessor	SPELD teachers	Classroom teachers	Parents	Students
A	6	1	5	2	6	15
B	5	1	3	4	7	11
C	9	1	4	1	7	10
Total	**20**	**3**	**12**	**7**	**19**	**36**

Table 2 shows the demographics of the student participants in the study

Table 2 **Student Demographics**

Students (n=34)		**Total**
Gender Boys		19
Girls		15
Age 7 yrs		5
8 yrs		1
9 yrs		9
10 yrs		15
11 yrs		3
12 yrs		1
Years in SPELD tutoring 0–1 yrs		4
1–2 yrs		11
2–3 yrs		12
3–4 yrs		4
4+ yrs		3
Ethnicity	New Zealanders	28
	English	5
	Australian	1

Cluster schools

The characteristics of the cluster schools visited in the project are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 **Summary of school decile**

School	Decile 10	Decile 9	Decile 8	Decile 7 and below	Decile 5 and below
A	5			1	
B	5				
C	3	3	1	1	1

There were a total of 11 contributing schools; eight full primary schools; and one secondary girls' school.

The high proportion of decile 7–10 schools is representative of the national overall picture and is indicative of SPELD tuition and assessment costs. This is a theme we pick up later in the report.

Data analysis

The transcripts of focus groups and interviews were analysed for themes related to the research questions. The research team wrote summary reflections from the fieldwork visits. Each researcher peer-reviewed their colleague's written work as the chapters took shape, discussing, adding and amending as they evolved.

Consent and ethics

All case study participants were sent an introductory letter and information/consent pack before the interviews. We obtained permission to interview the children from the school principal at each school, at times convenient to them. We ensured that parents had given their permission for their child to be interviewed before the schools were notified. No individuals or schools have been identified in the report.

Overview of the report structure

Chapter two of this report describes the school experiences of the students we interviewed prior to attending SPELD and the process which led to their enrolment with SPELD. The remainder of the report is organised according to the research questions. Chapter 3 discusses perceptions of student shifts in achievement; Chapter 4 discusses perceptions of shifts in SPELD students' attitudes to learning; Chapter 5 discusses perceptions of the strengths of the SPELD teaching programme; and Chapter 6 discusses participants' suggestions for improvement. Chapter 7 discusses SPELD's approach to building sector capability, and the final chapter briefly summarises the main findings derived from Phase One of the evaluation and raises some implications for Phase Two.

2. Students' pre-SPELD school experiences

This chapter describes students' schooling experiences before they started going to SPELD. Most of the evidence for this section comes from the parents' stories, as they responded to our question "How and why did your child come to SPELD?"

Pre-SPELD experiences

The response to this question from parents was the same in essence, in every case. Their child had shown unexpected and persistent lack of progress in reading, writing, and spelling over the first three years of their schooling and parents were worried, but in most cases, getting little support from schools.

> They put him into Reading Recovery but he didn't do well. They sent us to Pro Ed to get him tested and they said he had dyslexia. Nobody ever mentioned SPELD at school. The school offered nothing at that point, no interest at all. The collaboration between SPELD and the school is just hopeless. I feel quite short-changed by the school. [Mother of 10 year old boy]

> When you first find out your child has difficulties… if only there was some sort of package to say this is what you do, this is where you go. It is so difficult for parents. It's all kind of hush hush. It was even hard finding out about RTLBs. [Mother of 10 year old boy]

In a minority of cases, the schools did provide help, as this 12 year old girl and her mother described:

> I had a tough time in year two because my parents and my teacher didn't know that I was dyslexic—she [my class teacher] was really mean to me. She thought that I was just slacking. Year one and new entrants was fine—it was just Year two it started getting difficult and we had a relief teacher who actually found out that I was dyslexic. [Daughter]

> She was progressing at the expected level when she was five. In the second year we had huge problems. We had a relieving teacher for two weeks who read her diaries and said "What is going on, why are we having this trouble?" She came to me and said, "I really think you should look in this [SPELD's] direction. I have a 14 year old daughter who is dyslexic and she's the spitting image of your daughter". We had her tested by SPELD and we booked her into a SPELD teacher. Since then she has been under a learning support teacher at her school as well. [Mother]

Many parents described their child as having suffered extreme loss of confidence and self-esteem before they started with SPELD, as a result of their specific learning difficulties. Parents said their child had started school bright, happy and confident, with no signs of learning difficulties, but by

years two to three they were beginning to think of themselves as 'dumb' or 'stupid', because of the literacy difficulties they were experiencing. This was often reinforced by peers, teachers and even parents themselves, because of the lack of explanation for why this was the case, in an otherwise intelligent, articulate child with good ideas.

> At my old school I was bullied. [Girl, 12]

> Looking back, it started in Year two. He used to say "Mummy I don't want to go to school—I don't feel very well". But he hid it until Year four. It triggered a warning for me when he said "Mum I'm dumb, aren't I?" There was a bit of peer pressure from kids—like kids saying "Don't you know that? That's easy", or "You're stupid", because he was not getting it. His self esteem was rock bottom. The assessor said "He is dyslexic, but the primary concern is his low self esteem". [Mother of 10 year old boy]

Some parents reported instances of their own misconceptions that the child was just not trying, concentrating, or applying themselves hard enough to the task.

> It started as soon as he started school—no-one picked up on it and we just thought he wasn't trying—that it was his attitude. It's really awful now when you look back on it. [Mother of 10 year old boy]

> When my daughter's work got too hard, her eyes would go glassy and she would be in a totally different place. I think it was her brain saying, "It's too hard" and it would go chop, and close off. I asked the Reading Recovery teacher why it was happening, and she said, "If she [the student] chooses to do that, then there's nothing we can do about it". I was aghast! My daughter wasn't choosing! [Mother of two dyslexic children]

As a result of these misunderstandings, extra pressure often went on at home as well as at school, as the following mother of a 12 year old bravely admitted:

> At home she and I fought and fought and fought over her reading homework. It was hell on earth doing Toe by Toe[5]—ten minutes in the morning and ten minutes in the evening. It was a disaster. When she went back for a reassessment the assessor said she had gone backwards. Why? It was me trying too hard—it was our fighting.

Parents described their child experiencing extreme frustration and loss of faith in themselves, and some described them taking out their disappointment and anger in uncharacteristic behaviours.

> My son had no confidence or ability to do anything at all by the time he started SPELD. He had a very rough first few years at school—he had no self esteem at all. It was traumatic. He had a particularly difficult first year at school. I sent him along to school as a happy outgoing, vivacious five year old and by the end of his first year—by age six, he was wetting the bed, he was very withdrawn, and he was nervous. I found out what he had been through in that first year of school, from a friend who was a teacher at the school, and it was traumatic for him. He was from then on very apprehensive about school. It was three to four years after starting school before he started SPELD. [Mother of 11 year old boy]

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[5] *Toe by Toe* is a highly structured multi-sensory reading manual used by some SPELD teachers. Students work through daily exercises to practice learning.

How SPELD became involved

The processes of parents connecting with SPELD were varied and often random. Parents reported knowing that their child was intelligent, but often not knowing about specific learning disabilities. This caused some extreme anxiety as they struggled for answers. Some parents heard by word of mouth about SPELD, while others had prior experiences of family members who had had SLDs, so were more aware.

> We could tell that he hadn't progressed—he'd actually gone backwards in reading and writing, and he was struggling with maths. But we didn't know why. At the beginning of Year five I went to see his teacher and she said get him tested for dyslexia. She put me on to the Deputy Principal who has a real passion for this area, who put me on to the tester. Then I rang my friend who has been down this road with her own child. She said "Ring this SPELD teacher—she is my life saviour". The school has set up for this SPELD help at school. By term 2 it was happening. [Mother of 10 year old boy]

> We found out about SPELD by browsing the internet. [Mother of 10 year old boy]

> For our child, we pushed it for two years with teachers and finally the teacher admitted there was a problem. She's a bright and bubbly little girl so she masks the problem. Teachers said, "She's a lovely child", and they said she was very young. But I knew there was a problem—I knew about SPELD because my brother did SPELD. [Mother of 9 year old girl]

Most parents reported experiencing a constant battle with schools to have their concerns taken seriously and for the school to recognise the problem.

> I struggle with not being taken seriously by the school. They don't think she has a problem, especially when she acts like a bright kid. [Mother of 12 year old girl]

> We didn't know she had learning difficulties until she was seven or eight. She's in a private school, which we decided was better for her because of the smaller classes and supposedly more individual attention. Her teacher couldn't figure out this kid who she could have a mature conversation with, but who couldn't read. Her middle name should be "It's too hard, I can't do it." By Year four she was achieving below average, but her teacher said, "No no, she's fine". I leaned on the school quite hard to have her assessed but they were not having a bar of it. Even after we had a SPELD assessment done ourselves, which we took to the school, they just said, "No, we're not going to follow those recommendations—look we'll do an IEP instead". [Mother of 11 year old girl]

Some parents said the class teacher would try to convince them that the child would come right in their own time, while others reported being told their child was just lazy or lacking concentration, and that by implication, they were "poor parents".

> He couldn't progress in reading, so when we went to see the teachers they suggested we play games and read more to him. They assumed we were bad parents—but we've been reading books to him since he was 6 months old. So they put him into Reading Recovery and after a year I went to see the teacher who said crossly, "He is the most difficult child I have ever tried to teach!" [Mother of 10 year old boy]

One classroom teacher demonstrated this perception:

> I haven't had a lot of experience of SPELD—I've heard a bit about it, but I've got one student in my English class who goes to SPELD, but she's only come into my class this year. I gave the students a spelling test and she showed up straight away. But the thing with this particular student is, I think, I feel she's disorganised, lazy, and unmotivated. So I think there's other issues rather than that she's dyslexic. It's her attitude—she's absolutely not trying—she's doesn't do her homework, she's the most disorganised in the class, she's never got her books.

A few parents however, were helped by teachers who agreed there was a problem and who suggested Reading Recovery or a SPELD assessment. Some teachers, after lack of progress in Reading Recovery, advised the mother to get the child assessed. Once the child was assessed they were advised to pay for SPELD tuition, and allocated a SPELD teacher. The journey to this point however, usually had taken several years.

Mothers spoke of this time as being the most worrying, fraught times where they experienced disappointment in their child and the school system, guilt that they were 'bad mothers', guilt towards their own child for getting so angry with them over their learning difficulties, anger with teachers and schools and their own lack of knowledge and understanding, and absolute relief when they heard their child was dyslexic, and there was a reason for their lack of progress.

> In Years two and three, we had asked, "Please be honest with us", and the teachers were. We got her assessed and had confirmation with the results. We were beginning to doubt ourselves so when we got the assessment we were affirmed. [Mother of 9 year old girl]

For many children and parents, the assessment from the SPELD assessor was the first glimmer of hope. Usually the report would be explained to the parents by the assessor with guidance as to the next steps. Another mother talked about her struggle and how the assessment confirmed for her what she had known for some time.

> I feel like I have struggled to be taken seriously to the point where I really did question whether I'm just imagining this or not, but I've got a seven year old as well, and he can spell and he can write and calculate far better than his big sister. So I've got to have the confidence that I know what I am talking about. You don't really get the teachers help—not when you've got a smart kid who is achieving really well in some areas. So she looks and acts like a normal kid. It is really hard to be taken seriously. I'm going to have psychological scars for the rest of my life. [Mother of 10 year old girl]

However, it was the SPELD teacher who played the main role in turning around what was often described by then, as a fairly desperate situation.

> There is no question about [SPELD teacher's] help. My son wouldn't be where he is now without it. She is quite exceptional. She tries so many different things, so many wonderful skills to help him do it his way. [Mother of 10 year old boy]

Apart from working with the child, the SPELD teacher's role also involved working with the mother—explaining dyslexia, reassuring them, describing how they would work with the child, raising parents' expectations for the child, carefully and tactfully reducing the stress levels and anxieties that were often playing out at home, and trying to help create a learning environment

that was positive. Two mothers who had the same SPELD teacher for their 10 year old sons, spoke about her influence on them:

> She gives you the peace of mind that your child is doing OK, and let's not get upset about this and they are doing really well—they can't do this, or this, or that, but they *can* do this. [Mother 'A']

> She [SPELD teacher] is a quite exceptional teacher. She keeps us up to the play with where our children are at, we can ring her at any time, plus she keeps up a relationship with the school—she goes three times a week. She keeps up a relationship with the class teacher and the teacher in charge of special learning. She's been very supportive—for me that's been my saving grace. [Mother 'B']

> She has become a friend of ours. This Ron Davis thing we went to last night, she rang us both this morning to find out what we thought of it. She is exceptional. [Mother 'A']

The SPELD teachers also spoke about their roles with parents:

> Parents will spend a lot of time talking to you, and some even come and watch you take lessons.

> Mums need a lot of reassurance. They despair because they know the child is not stupid, and they think—what have I done wrong? So we reassure them that the child is intelligent. We try to take the tension out of the situation. Sometimes the mother and child are at loggerheads.

Summary

The findings so far, point to a very similar picture for many students with SLDs and their families. The child's lack of progress in literacy and sometimes maths in the first years of school appear in the main to be noticed first by parents. When raised with teachers few parents are taken seriously, and this situation at its worst can continue for several years. Often these children are part of the Reading Recovery programme in schools but do not progress in the expected way. Some schools appear to take a more proactive role at this point than others, and arrange for further assessment of the child. It also seems that in some cases nothing further is done for the child by the school and frustrated parents find out about the help SPELD offers in random ways.

These findings raise concerns about:

- students' sudden, severe, and sustained loss of self esteem and confidence in their first few years of schooling;
- the length of time it often takes for schools to recognise a problem, before the SPELD intervention;
- lack of knowledge and support for parents, who are sometimes fobbed off by schools;
- lack of knowledge of symptoms and consequences of SLDs by classroom teachers;
- lack of current understanding in schools about the expertise SPELD offers; and

- a wider concern about the unknown number of students with SLDs who ‘fall through the gaps’ and are never correctly diagnosed and assessed.

3. Shifts in SPELD students' achievement

In this chapter we present the perceptions of parents, students, SPELD teachers and assessors of shifts in students' achievement. We will supplement this in Phase Two with quantitative data on students' achievement during SPELD.

Nature of progress

For many students the nature of progress is slow and there may not be much obvious improvement for some time, as the following SPELD teachers described:

> In a year you are hardly scratching the surface with these children. You work with a child for a year or more and almost feel you are getting no-where, and all of a sudden it comes together and it clicks into place.
>
> You definitely make a difference, but its slow progress…like you won't see a difference in ten weeks—you have to look for the long haul. You see a shift in how they feel about themselves, and you help them to re-label themselves so they are not stupid. This boy I had—when he came he was six and he was on the 8th percentile for reading. When he left at the age of 11 he was reading at a 12–13 year old level. His spelling was still pretty awful. But over the long haul you see the shifts.

One of the SPELD teachers talked about the reason that shifts in achievement took such a long time.

> This business of things taking a long time—well that is the nature of our job. Not only do you have to teach in a different way, but you are taking an eight or nine year old, who, ever since they have been at school, have been doing things the wrong way round. There may be four years of unlearning to do.

An assessor explained why parents consider progress to be slow.

> The shift usually comes about because of what the parents find out in terms of their expectations of the child. It takes two years for the child to read to the level the parents perceive they should be reading at, based on their child's friends' reading capabilities—for the child to read to its age level. What the parents see as change from an intervention, and what we see, is different. They've come [to SPELD] because they are saying the school is not doing enough. There's huge emotion from the parents, and huge emotion from the child reacting to the parent….A lot of the success comes—because we tell them [the parents] if there is a problem, yes there's a problem—and that's a huge relief….Secondly we tell them "Its going to take us two to three years, so back off". We tell them "The school is doing a good job—they are trying to help your child like anyone else"…There's a huge parental shift, probably more than the child's shift, and a huge amount of education required of the

> parent. What we [SPELD] are doing that's different from what other organizations are doing out there is spending time educating the parents. It's really important. Lowering their level of expectation and taking the pressure off the child.

The emotional impact of having a child with SLDs, experienced by parents (mothers mainly) in our fieldwork was a major finding, and the pressure on the child, as spoken about here by this assessor, was understandable.

One classroom teacher who was familiar with dyslexia, having taught in the United Kingdom where teachers are trained to recognise SLDs, explained that it was difficult to see progress with the majority of these students in only one academic year.

> I've taught in the U.K. where there is Dyslexia and Dyscalculia testing which you can do in the classroom on computers. We only see them for one year so it is kind of hard—I know that her SPELD teacher is really proud of the progress that this student has made. She was in my class when she started at year three and she has made heaps of progress. I didn't see heaps of progress with the one child that I have over the one year.

A mother told us how she had observed her two dyslexic children make slow but eventual progress:

> When most children learn they go up in steps, but my children take longer to get to the same place as these kids. This is because they have longer times where they are walking along the flat path, and then they go up some of the steps, and then some more walking along the flat, and then up some more steps. They get there in the end but it takes much longer [paraphrased].

While slow progress seemed to be the most usual nature of progression described to us, assessors were able to testify to where rapid progress sometimes occurred.

> Yes—I see it really clearly with the re-tests. This child made 1.5 standard deviation (SD) progress in about 18 months and that's not uncommon. Some tutors are consistently getting those sorts of results. There are others that don't, where the progress is just steady. My expectation is that you have made a difference when you have got a result of at least 0.5 SD in some areas—but when you get one like this it makes it all worthwhile. For example the Broad Reading skills has gone from 57 to 92 … so those are big jumps.
>
> It is surprising what happens—I always think that it takes 18 months—if they are older—and then you will get one really big jump. On this report oral comprehension has seen a big jump. Partly it is the child's self-efficacy, and partly it's the teacher—it's difficult to pin down what it is exactly.

SPELD teachers spoke of students who had made outstanding progress over time.

> Another student I taught—he was an absolute shocker when he first came. He couldn't even write his name. He used to have tantrums here, he used to roll around the floor—he was so desperate. Well today he is New Zealand's youngest pilot.

> This girl came when she was six and she was severely dyslexic. We have worked together over her whole school life-time, and her aim this year is to write her NCEA exam without a reader/writer. And she will do it.

In other cases, there were reports of progress made in some areas, but not others.

> Her spelling age has improved three years in the space of six months. Reading comprehension has gone from stanine 4 to stanine 8 in 12 months. She still struggles with maths—she can do her basic facts verbally because her father practices with her, but not in a written test. [Mother of 11 year old girl]

> Her reading age has improved so she is now reading above her age level, but her spelling is still appalling. She is still struggling with spelling. [Mother of 9 year old girl]

> The thing with the SPELD approach is we have a very systematic approach—so hopefully there are no gaps. I was so pleased with one of my pupils who had a re-test late last year. Her reading progress was fantastic –but her spelling was so disappointing, which was 7. But her reading fluency, word attack and her decoding was fantastic. We had gone from here to there. [SPELD teacher]

Most students (88%) considered that their learning and achievement had improved since attending SPELD.

> I'm reading harder books. I moved up one or two levels. I'm below my classmates in reading but I'm catching up slowly. [Boy, 10]

> OK I have got better because I've practised and now I can read a whole story by myself. My favourite books at the moment are art books, books on pirates, and books on knights in castles. I tried reading the Narnia books but they have got lots of hard words [Boy, 9].

Many of the pairs of students and parents told us about improvements, validating each other's stories. An 11 year old boy and his mother said:

> I'm reading chapter books now and I only used to read comics and real short books before. My favourites are The Hobbit and the Narnia books. [Boy, 11]

> The major achievement has been his ability to read. He is now reading books—he only read comics before. He is trying to do things, and has achieved huge personal goals, he asks questions, and now enjoys learning. He's only been going for a year and six weeks. [Mother of 11 year old boy]

A mother and daughter commented:

> Now as a Year six, she has an instructional reading age of 13–14, but part of that could have been Reading Recovery. The assessor was great because she recognised that she had some behaviour issues, which she explained to her. [Mother of 10 year old girl]

> I've got better at spelling—I went for a reassessment and have improved a lot. Everyone is really pleased. My reading has also improved. [Girl, 10]

SPELD assessors and teachers considered that there were a number of contributing factors to rates of progress in SPELD, including frequency of lessons, relationship with the SPELD teacher, and parental expectations. We explore these more fully in Chapter 5.

Summary

The SPELD teachers we interviewed used the assessor's reports to guide their teaching and learning programme. Until recently, assessing students has not been nationally systematic, because the baseline and retest WJ-III tool has only been in use by all SPELD assessors since 2008. Use of the WJ-III began in 2002, with the majority of testers using it by 2005. Prior to this, assessors used a range of different tests to assess students. In addition, annual re-testing of students, while recommended by SPELD, has not always been carried out consistently because of the additional costs incurred to parents. This presents a problem in evaluating on a national scale any shifts which may have occurred. By Phase Two there will be some consistent national data available and we will use it to evaluate shifts in achievement.

The main findings about shifts in achievement gained from Phase One were:

- For many students the nature of progress is slow with little obvious improvement for some time;
- For some students there is rapid improvement and large shifts in achievement;
- For other students there is uneven progress, so for instance, while they may increase their reading levels, their spelling may remain static; and
- Rates of progress seemed to be related to a range of factors which we explore more fully in Chapter 5. These included:
  - frequency of lessons;
  - parental expectations; and
  - relationship with the SPELD teacher.

4. Shifts in SPELD students' attitudes

In this chapter we present the perceptions of parents, students, SPELD teachers, classroom teachers and assessors regarding shifts in students' attitudes to learning.

We discuss:

- students' perceptions of shifts in self esteem and attitudes to learning during SPELD;
- how SPELD is perceived to have brought about this shift; and
- older SPELD students' attitudes to learning.

Students' self esteem and attitudes to learning during SPELD

The most compelling stories from the interviews with students, parents, SPELD teachers and assessors involved shifts in student self confidence and self esteem.

> Until you build the self-efficacy you are not actually going to get the shifts—so you are trying to get some progress then building the self-efficacy and it is very much backwards and forwards. [Assessor]

> We thought that he always liked going to school—but now it is different. He says, "I want to go to school Mummy—I'm good at what I'm doing now I can read a book". [Mother of 10 year old boy]

Many students we interviewed appeared to have good self esteem and talked confidently about their strengths and weaknesses.

> I need to learn a bit more to get my spelling and writing up. I'm a bit behind, but not too far.

> Yes in reading I was quite behind. My writing is quite slow and I was a bit slow in my homework.

> I'm best at war gaming and thinking out battle strategies. I'm dyslexic and have a different way of thinking to other people. My thinking is slower in literacy than others, but not in maths or war gaming. [Boy, 11]

Many surprised us by saying they liked reading, in spite of the difficulties they encountered.

> I like reading to myself—I see the visions in my head when I read—I don't see them with my eyes. [Boy, 10]

> Mum reads to me every night—"The Golden Compass"—the whole series. The stories are always better than movies. I've got a much bigger imagination than all the girls in my class. [Girl, 12]

How SPELD brought about this shift in attitudes to learning

We found there were at least four factors that were critical in SPELD teachers' ability to shift students' attitudes about themselves and their learning. The first was that they established a good relationship with the student. The second was in helping the child understand why they learned the way they did. The third was to establish confidence that they could learn successfully even if it was going to take longer than other students and would require lots of practice and work on their part, and the fourth was establishing a cycle of success in the learning process.

(a) Relationships

A quality learning situation is always dependent on the relationship between student and teacher, and where there are students with vulnerabilities such as low self esteem and learning difficulties, this relationship becomes even more critical. The majority of students (88 percent) told us they liked SPELD and they liked their SPELD teacher. Comments included:

> My SPELD teacher is so nice—I just love her. [Girl, 7]
>
> She's a nice teacher and she's kind and she makes me feel good about spelling. [Boy, 9]

SPELD teachers were able to win the trust of their students by demonstrating their belief in the child's intelligence and ability to learn. Parents also recognised how important it was for the child to have someone who believed in their child's potential abilities.

> The biggest thing they [SPELD teachers] do is provide the emotional support, because they make the children feel accepted for who they are, and they are there for them—someone who cares. [Mother of two dyslexic children]
>
> I have the utmost admiration for his SPELD teacher. She knows where he is at. I would have been completely lost without her. The school has been fantastic, but the SPELD teacher was marvellous. [Mother of 10 year old boy]

One of the SPELD teachers described how she supported her students.

> I see my role in three ways—one as their tutor to provide them with some underpinning skills that they don't have because of their dyslexia and because they learn differently and their needs aren't necessarily being met in class. The second role is as a supporter because often these children struggle at school, so there's a lot of emotional support needed. Then as an advocate for them with teachers and parents, like with the big amounts of homework they get from both teachers and they are tired when they get home from school.

Teachers' qualities of patience and understanding appeared to help cement the relationship for these children, and most of the SPELD teachers were reported by parents and students, to have these qualities.

> His SPELD teacher probably gives him some of things that at times we struggle to give him cause we are so frustrated with him and she doesn't judge him if he gets it wrong five times. He knows that he can relax with her and make mistakes with her, and that its the best place

> to make them. The thing is, all her charges get treated like they are just as special as the next kid. They are just special in a different way [Mother of 10 year old boy].
>
> She [SPELD teacher] doesn't go fast, and she understands me, and I like her more than my class teacher. [Girl, 9]

When there is not a good relationship between teacher and student, expectations of learning success will diminish, as was illustrated to us in a few instances. A small number of students were not happy with their SPELD teacher.

> I don't like going to SPELD—its really boring—we do the same things over and over again. [Girl, 9]
>
> Mum decided I needed SPELD. I didn't, and I still hate it. I don't think I'm getting better. She [SPELD teacher] is OK but I don't think she is my best person. The work I'm doing with her makes me feel I'm about five years old, whereas I like the work at school. She [SPELD teacher] makes me write a story about what I do in the weekend of three sentences, and its way too easy for me. Also her spelling is too easy—I need more of a challenge. [Girl, 10]

One mother was also critical of the SPELD teacher working with her son, and felt she was not working effectively with him.

> She's an older lady and a bit forgetful, and not that inspiring to him [her son]. She seems to keep repeating the same things and she's quite structured. (Mother of 9 year old boy)

However, a SPELD teacher explained that SPELD policy aims for a good relationship between student and teacher, so if there is a problem, it should be quickly remedied.

> SPELD has a policy that if you have a child that you can't work with, even a clash of personalities, then you must pass them on to someone who can, because it is in the interest of the child.

An assessor was worried, in spite of this, that this job required expertise and should not be left to an administrator.

> There should be greater consideration given to more careful matching of the tutor and child. It should be more than just sending a child along when a vacancy comes up.

(b) Helping the child understand why they learn the way they do.

SPELD teachers spoke about their role with students in explaining to them why they learn the way they do.

> Often children have struggled at schools with teachers who do not understand what dyslexia is. Like one little girl I had said "My teacher said if some children can go fast in a spelling test, then the rest of us should be able to go fast too". So you are supporting them because they may never get 10 out of 10 in a spelling test—so you are providing lots of emotional support.

Students had understood this.

> I'm dyslexic and I need a bit of help. It's kind of because I'm terrible at spelling—just like my mum. [Boy, 10]
>
> I'm dyslexia (sic). I've got a different way of thinking than other people—my thinking is slower in literacy than others. [Boy, 11]
>
> I love going to [SPELD teacher] because she understands me. [Boy, 10]
>
> She lets me have enough time to finish my work—at school I get rushed. [Girl, 10]

SPELD teachers demonstrated their understanding to students:

> Part of it is they see somebody who has recognised they need help; somebody is talking to them not as if they're stupid—but in a way that is meaningful; and suddenly they feel important. Their attitudes change—the children understand they are precious and here is someone who understands.

SPELD teachers also spoke about the way they were able to explain to their students why their learning was so difficult, and about their need to learn from a phonetic approach. They explained how dyslexic children are often very visual but often lacked the auditory discrimination of other children, and how many have difficulty in particular with short vowels sounds.

Students talked about the skills they had been taught, and how they realised these were essential for them to learn.

> She teaches me how to break up the words and sound them out. [Girl, 10]
>
> SPELD helps me with my phonics—which we used to do that in class when we were little but we don't do it any more. I need that help. SPELD helps me with that. I find those things quite hard. Sometimes I think I need a bit more help than the teachers can give me in class—they have so many other children and don't have time. [9 yr. old girl]
>
> She has taught me spelling rules which I can use in class too. [Boy, 11]
>
> She's [SPELD teacher] helped me how to hold my pen and she taught me how to write ds and bs. Little bs and ds look the same but they face opposite directions. I remember by—with a d I go around, up and down, and with a b I go down and around. (Boy, 9)
>
> Shall I tell you how I know 'because'? Well, its 'Betty eats crunchy apples until she explodes', cause you go Betty is B and E is eats and C is crunchy…[etc.] My teacher teached. (sic) it to me. (Girl, 9)

(c) Establishing a cycle of success

Students began to experience confidence in their learning ability once they had begun to trust their teacher and believe in the positive messages she was building. Once they understood why they were experiencing difficulties, their teachers also explained and demonstrated to them that they could learn and experience success. Teachers did this by making learning manageable, accessible and enjoyable for each student. Lessons were organised with frequent changes, such as focused word study activities interspersed with literacy games. Students saw SPELD as fun. They also

liked not having time pressure in their activities. The learning was at their level and described as easy enough for them to do. They felt helped and supported.

> I love going to her (SPELD teacher) because she helps me with my learning, with my reading, with rhyme and words and vowels and consonants and saying "I can do it" with my school work. [9 yr. old girl]

> She doesn't growl and she makes me feel good about my learning. [Boy, 10]

One of the ways teachers helped students build confidence in their learning, was by speaking truthfully and realistically to them about how to overcome the difficulties they experienced. They explained that it was going to involve a lot of practice and repetition, a lot of extra work than other children, but that these things would pay off. Several students explained to us that they have to work twice as hard as other students to learn the same things.

> Having dyslexia means it's harder to learn—and if you put in lots more effort, its still 50 percent more effort than other people. [Boy, 11]

> I have double the homework of other kids, but it does help me. [Boy, 10]

> Because students were able to experience success in their learning, they became more confident about their ability, and more motivated to continue trying in their learning.

One SPELD teacher summed up the cycle of attitudinal change that occurred for all her students.

> Within the first two to four lessons you can see the child's attitude is different…and although they may not see huge change, they can see some change [in their learning]. That confidence thing and that attitude change we always see.

The following student had experienced very low self esteem before starting SPELD, but after a year and six weeks of SPELD tuition he now had gained a realistic sense of hope, he was experiencing success, and he felt motivated to keep learning.

> I'd like to be up with the top people of my class but I don't think I ever will be because of my dyslexia, but I think I can be up with the majority, if I do SPELD for one more year. [Boy, 11]

Older SPELD students' attitudes to learning

We heard reports of SPELD students' attitudes changing with age. Of the total 34 students we interviewed there were three students who said they didn't like going to SPELD. These were mainly older students who attended SPELD in school time and did not like their classmates seeing them withdrawn from class. They indicated they had become aware of other children's attitudes about SPELD which were not always positive.

> I go to SPELD for spelling and hand writing. I do it before school in the special room and my friends see me go—I don't like it. I think it would have been better if I had started earlier. I'm too old. Also, I would rather go to her [SPELD teacher's] house rather than at school. [Girl, 10 yrs]

> It's kind of embarrassing still going to SPELD, because I'm Year six now. [10 year old girl]

SPELD teachers described how many of their students over the years had stopped coming to lessons during the intermediate years, because they were self conscious about attending. However, there were some who once they had started college realised they needed continued help and had returned.

> When they start intermediate, in those teenage years, they don't want to come and see you, but I always say "I'm here. You can always come back". And 9/10 come back because they are sitting in those college classrooms thinking "I can't do this—I need help". But when they come back its always a different relationship because their parents haven't sent them, and you have to help them with whatever it is they need help with.
>
> I think SPELD should be within a school programme, but the difficulty with that is, the bigger kids don't want to be seen to be different. One girl said to me yesterday, "I will go to the SPELD teacher, but you make sure (a) that no-one else sees me and (b) that it's not in school time". [SPELD assessor]

Some of the older students indicated that they intended continuing with SPELD for as long as they needed to.

> I think if I need the help at College, I'd go for it, because if I need it, I need it.

Summary

The cyclical process of experiencing success in learning is vital to achievement gains. Constant failure will stall or slow down learning, as it lowers self esteem. Most of the SPELD students we interviewed had experienced that downward slide and lost confidence in their capability to learn, particularly in the area of literacy, before they started SPELD.

Parents observed that SPELD teachers were able to turn students' low self esteem around and raise their sense of confidence in their own abilities. This led to positive shifts in attitudes towards learning for the majority of students and contributed to students' increased motivation, which led to sustained efforts in learning. Most students reported a positive relationship with their SPELD teacher who demonstrated that they believed in their abilities to learn, who helped them understand their learning disability, and who gave them strategies to overcome them.

Some SPELD students became self conscious about needing SPELD interventions as they entered their teenage years, and were reluctant to attend, but it was reported that some returned to SPELD of their own accord at secondary school when they realized they still needed help.

It was evident from the students' and SPELD teachers' interviews that turning around this downward slide and reintroducing a positive sustaining learning cycle was one of the major achievements of the SPELD teachers, because it had occurred for most children in the study. This

is an important finding, given the association between attitudes to learning and achievement shown in the research literature (see for example, Alton-Lee, 2003[6]).

[6] Alton-Lee, A. (2003). Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (BES). Wellington; Ministry of Education.

5. Perceived strengths of the SPELD teaching programme

In this chapter we report on the components of the SPELD teaching programme that were considered to contribute to positive shifts in student outcomes.

SPELD teachers reported that lessons included a range of activities from a systematic phonics programme; activities focused on auditory and visual perception and phonological awareness; revision of previous teaching; comprehension; reading; writing; spelling; and maths, depending on the needs of the student. Most activities are short, interactive, matched to the child's level of mastery, and designed to be fun. Teachers and assessors considered that there were no stand-alone components or 'magic bullets' of the SPELD teaching programme, but rather a number of 'eclectic' components that were delivered in different combinations according to individual student's needs.

The most frequently mentioned features considered by teachers to contribute to positive outcomes included:

- specialist teaching;
- a personalised programme of interventions based on assessment;
- one to one tuition with positive reinforcement; and
- focused, structured learning, with opportunities for practice and repetition.

Specialist teaching

The SPELD professionals we interviewed considered having teachers with specialised up to date knowledge about learning disabilities and dyslexia, as well as experience in teaching students with SLDs to be a critical factor in supporting student's academic achievement.

The following SPELD teacher explained that to tailor her teaching to the individual needs of students required her to have wide specialist knowledge.

> That means for me I have to have a jolly good knowledge of heaps of stuff out there, I'm continually having to learn, I'm continually challenged. I have to take bits and bobs out of all kinds of things to help that particular student do the best they can.

A personalised programme of interventions based on assessment

Another component frequently mentioned was the focused, data driven, individualised, programme to strengthen what the child needed help with, based on evidence from the assessor's report and SPELD teacher's observations.

SPELD teachers reported:

> The SPELD approach is very eclectic and very individually tailored. We use whatever method we feel is right for that child. The courses we do prepare us to do this in a variety of ways. We work from the assessor's report and the needs of the child. It's a brilliant starting point [the report] and when you meet the child you give flesh to the programme.
>
> The reason why I am involved with SPELD, and not with other intervention organisations, is that SPELD's bottom line is to teach to the needs of the student. The student doesn't have to fit the method. We have to make the method fit the student…What I do know is that no-one learns by one method only. We need a good healthy handful of everything.

Many of the interventions, according to the SPELD teachers, involved some form of phonetic work.

> Many of these children struggle with the vowel blends which are not taught particularly well in schools. Individual children don't pick up on the short vowels. Most of these kids are very visual.

These seemed to be useful to students.

> Word families are useful. I can use this in class, and to break up words if you don't know what they are. That has made a difference. (Girl, 10)
>
> It's a little bit easier, especially with reading because I use my SPELD teacher's strategy more than anyone's strategy to work out the hard word like looking at the beginning, and working from the beginning, to the middle, to the end. (Girl, 9)

One of the assessors talked about how SPELD now works in a more diverse way than it did in the past, and that diagnosis is more complex, and therefore it was important for interventions to be appropriate for the child.

> The modern SPELD believes tutors are open to all of the interventions, as opposed to what it was in the olden days, when it was a fight for phonics against Reading Recovery. We testers see it as much more complex—its not just about dyslexia now—there may be other issues like behaviour issues, or we may need to send the child to an optometrist or an audiologist. I think we shouldn't be looking at the label, but should be looking at the interventions. This is where the MOE have got it right. It is an RTI model (Response to an Intervention). You have to make sure the intervention is the right intervention for the child.

One to one tuition and positive reinforcement

The component reported most frequently by participants that contributed to positive shifts in students' learning, was one to one tuition. The students and parents identified this as the biggest and most helpful difference compared to their school learning.

> At school there's other kids. Me and my SPELD teacher stick to the things I need to learn. It's not harder, just different learning. (Boy, 10)

> She loves the one-to-one, because things were going over her head in the classroom. [Mother of 10 year old girl]

The SPELD teachers also agreed that this component was critical:

> They really need the one to one teaching—the earlier the better, then they open up and with the specialised teaching you see their progress.

> At the end of the day it comes back to the individual child. There is no one magic bullet and that is the dilemma that faces the schools. That's why it can only be one on one. Some schools try to work in little groups and it just cannot work.

SPELD teachers recognised that positive reinforcement was critical in turning around students' negative attitudes to learning, and they provided rewards and positive encouragement for the small steps students made in these sessions.

> I work on their low self esteem first, so for every little achievement there is praise. I use little bits of biscuits and chocolate, and I keep telling them they are bright. [SPELD teacher]

Students noticed the more positive environment.

> She doesn't growl and she makes me feel good about my learning. (Boy, 9)

> When you do good work, she'll give you stickers. At school they just say 'good work'. (Boy, 11)

Focused, structured learning, with opportunities for practice and repetition

SPELD teachers maximised student's concentration, engagement and motivation by structuring their sessions with short, focused, learning activities, interspersed with educational games at appropriate intervals to. Students therefore saw their learning as manageable and fun.

> Its pretty good—you get to do spelling games and then working in a book. The games help you remember. (Boy, 9)

> The activities are always short, interesting, fun and at the right level. (Girl, 10)

SPELD teachers believed repetition and practice were necessary because many students had poor listening and memory skills.

> You need to teach in a clear, step by step, structured way. It requires a lot of repetition because they are children who don't remember—they don't listen, so they don't remember.
>
> Every lesson you have to revise because often their short term memory is poor. In the long school holidays they forget what they were very good at before them. Its constant practice to establish those connections in the brain, so that after a while they don't have to think that 'c' followed by an 'e' or and 'I' sounds like an 's'.

One SPELD teacher believed that one of the reasons for the large back-log of dyslexic children in New Zealand is because many children are missing out on learning basic alphabet sounds and numbers before starting school and during the first two years of schooling. These foundation concepts are acquired through repetition and rote learning in her opinion. She explained:

> When our little people start school, they're not spending enough time understanding concepts of what the letters and numbers are. They need a lot of time. We only learn these through repetition. Our children are missing nursery rhymes, jingles, and learning things by rote. I've a little chappie who's five—nearly six, and he hasn't a clue about the alphabet. Our children had Sesame Street. He doesn't—he can tell me all about Bat Man though. They can learn these rap songs, so it seems to me if you can learn them you can learn your times tables. If you don't get the foundations right …well…So we end up taking a lot of learners right back to the alphabet.

Because of the time limit on the SPELD lesson, an important part of the programme was the requirement that parents follow up the new teaching by helping their child master the skills through homework practice. SPELD teachers believed that the parents' contribution in following up on homework increased the child's chances of making progress.

> If the parents do not help regularly, and make it more like a game, then its hard work.

Summary

The strengths of the SPELD teaching programme seen to contribute to positive outcomes for students included:

- SPELD teachers' specialist knowledge and experience of teaching students with SLDs, which is over and above classroom teacher's knowledge and experience;
- Learning programmes and interventions based on data, and individually tailored to student needs;
- One-to-one tuition compared to classroom teaching; and
- Focused learning with time for students to practice new strategies.

6. Suggestions for improvement

There were three main ways in which participants considered the impact of SPELD could be improved. They were:

- increasing the frequency of tuition;
- increasing knowledge about dyslexia in the school sector; and
- strengthening partnerships through collaboration.

Increasing the frequency of tuition

The most common delivery pattern reported to us was students receiving SPELD tuition for one hour a week. While this is meant to be supplemented with regular homework practice, many SPELD teachers and assessors believed it did not provide enough lasting guidance for students, and would be more effective if it occurred twice a week or more.

> The component that contributes the most to shifts in student outcomes is the greater frequency of the lesson. It needs to be two or three times a week—at least two 45 minute episodes. And that's not me saying that—it's the research that says this. And personally, I think this should be in school time [SPELD assessor].

> With young children it's better to do two lessons a week because of their concentration span [SPELD teacher].

Many of the parents we spoke with also perceived there to be a relationship between frequency of lessons and progress.

> SPELD has helped her [daughter] learn phonetically, but one hour a week isn't enough. She still can't read or write and she's 10 now. [Mother of 10 year old girl]

> By my son having SPELD three times a week, he has a far better understanding of words and why they are put together, than I do. Without question it [SPELD] has been invaluable by teaching him in a different way than the school does. He is very motivated, he has great focus and great ideas. [Mother of 10 year old boy]

However, for many parents in the study, SPELD sessions once a week were as much as they could afford, and teachers felt this was better than none at all.

> It's amazing how much progress some children make with one hour a week—it's just phenomenal. [SPELD teacher]

> Yes but it depends on the follow-up at home too. With some children there's progress, but with others there is little. [SPELD teacher]

Increasing knowledge about dyslexia in the school sector

Many of the SPELD teachers spoke about the need to educate teachers and pre-service teachers about dyslexia and SLDs, as they believed there is very little understanding of it in classrooms. None of the SPELD teachers had been trained in this area when they were at Teachers College and most believed students today are also not trained. This they felt was the obvious place to start.

> There is a need to train mainstream teachers so they can recognise dyslexia in the classrooms.
>
> We need to become part of the normal system. They [children with dyslexia] need to be recognised early—there needs to be training.

The assessors also felt that at the very least teachers should be taught to recognise children with dyslexia and SLDs, even if they were not given the specialist training to help them, so that these children could be picked up earlier than they were being and referred for assessments.

SPELD teachers and assessors saw one way of doing this was to build stronger partnerships with schools.

Strengthening partnerships through collaboration

With a few exceptions there was little evidence of partnerships between SPELD teachers and classroom teachers in our study. The fact that we had so few classroom teachers respond to our invitation to be interviewed, is in itself evidence of this. Most of the classroom teachers who did respond, were sympathetic to SPELD but did not know much about it and had come to the focus group to find out more.

We saw a few examples in the study where schools were working with the SPELD teacher in a collaborative way on a student's programme, but these examples were in the minority. In these cases where there was collaboration, there was usually one staff member who had an interest or understanding of SPELD who had initiated the practice. In some cases it was the SENCO, the RTLB or learning support teacher, and in one case it was a principal. In all the cases, the SPELD teacher had been invited in to the school to take lessons for the SPELD students during class time. This had resulted in the following practices:

- the classroom teacher would leave the SPELD teacher to set the student's spelling list for the week;
- either teacher would give less homework to the child because they were aware the other gave homework;
- the classroom teacher would ask the SPELD teacher to act as a reader writer for the student in tests; and
- the SPELD teacher would test the child in some class tests.

However, the following comments suggest that even in schools collaborating more closely with SPELD, there was still relatively little sharing of information.

> Most classroom teachers are happy to meet me, but we really don't collaborate. [SPELD teacher]

> A lot of the difficulty is both the classroom teachers and the SPELD teachers have their own agenda, and somehow we can't marry. [SPELD teacher]

> I haven't had that much communication with the SPELD teacher to tell the truth and that could be partly me, missing meetings and things like that, but I haven't had a whole lot of communication. She would come in and tell me how he was going and things he was working on, and if it worked in with what we were teaching then that was great, if it didn't, it didn't. [Classroom teacher]

> The class teachers don't practice what the SPELD tutor does, but they all talk to one another. [Parent]

There was some indication that classroom teachers wanted more contact with SPELD teachers, and SPELD teachers wanted more contact with classroom teachers.

> X [student] was in my class last year. I haven't seen any marked progress during the year because of SPELD, possibly because he has dyslexia and dyspraxia. It would be useful if SPELD sends their programme and their IEP for the child to school, so we can link it with what we do in the classroom, and also an end of year report to show us the result. Some of us teachers are not really aware of what is done at SPELD. The parents give us information but it is never enough [Classroom teacher].

An assessor spoke of the need to work with mainstream teachers:

> We should also be giving our knowledge to classroom teachers, like I have done—that knowledge we have got on dyslexia and learning difficulties. No-one else out there in New Zealand has this knowledge of working with these children as long as we have. I would like to be in schools more. It's crucial our role in schools. That's what we should be doing. That's where we work best.

We conclude this chapter by raising an important question about who's responsibility it is to ensure that shared understandings are built between all partners, because it seems logical to us that students with SLDs would benefit if the SPELD teacher, the classroom teacher, the assessor and the parent were all 'working on the same page'. As one SPELD teacher said:

> The ideal world would be to have the SPELD teacher, the classroom teacher and the parent all working together. This doesn't usually happen.

This would be particularly beneficial at the time of the assessor's report. Both teachers and parents had problems understanding the assessor's report, which was written in academic language they did not understand entirely. A number said, "I can understand about 80 percent of the report". A principal told us informally that she found it difficult to relate the assessor's results with tests and assessments the schools use. She said she had read many assessors' reports but could not interpret where the assessor said the child was at, with where the school said it was,

because both were using different measurement tools and they did not match. This seems to be an area where SPELD and the school system could benefit by working out some assessment measures that translate across both organisations. It was an example where SPELD and mainstream schooling needs to be working on the same page for the benefit of the child.

We did hear one story from an assessor however, where SPELD and the school had worked together with very good results:

> At a local school with this child we were placing, we had some amazing meetings with the RTLB and parents there. We set everything up in the school so when she moved in the transition went smoothly. Yes, I think SPELD should be within a school programme.

Generally though, we encountered many stories of students and parents trying to negotiate the two separate worlds of SPELD teaching and mainstream teaching situations, with little success.

Summary

The components that were perceived to strengthen SPELD's impact were:

- More frequent tuition, as one hour a week was not seen as enough, but was regarded as better than nothing;
- Increasing knowledge about dyslexia in the school sector;
- Strengthening partnerships between SPELD teachers, classroom teachers, parents and assessors, to ensure a shared understanding of the student's disabilities, needs and most effective teaching approaches.

7. SPELD's approach to building sector capability

SPELD NZ provides initial training and continued professional development for SPELD teachers, and, in some cases, assessors. National conferences with international speakers are organised, to keep members up to date with the latest research, interventions and thinking about Students with Learning Disabilities.

In this chapter we present the perceptions of SPELD teachers and assessors on SPELD's effectiveness in building sector capability. We also comment on two participants' experiences of providing professional development to the wider school sector.

Initial training

Assessors

To be accepted into the SPELD Assessor Training potential assessors need to be registered with NZCER Psychological Test Centre at Level C. This requirement ensures that they have some background training at university level in psychometric assessment. Once accepted into the programme SPELD assessors go through a week long intensive training course, three days of which are taken up with training in administration and interpretation of the WJ-III. The final two days concentrate on SPELD's approach to SLD's and their systems and processes. After completion of the training newly trained assessors go through a probation period during which they have their first three reports peer reviewed by experienced assessors, before they are accepted as fully fledged assessors. It is our understanding that this processes has been recently implemented by SPELD in an attempt to standardise the quality of the assessment reports produced around the country.

SPELD teachers

To be registered as a SPELD teacher involves teachers holding a recognised New Zealand teaching certificate and completing the SPELD NZ Certificate course in specific learning disabilities, which is recognised by NZQA. This course is 400 hours and is available both online and face to face. To become a SPELD teacher requires applicants completing this course and then applying to become a probationary SPELD teacher. This involves providing tuition for a minimum of 40 hours for two students, submitting appraisals, submitting evidence of student re-tests and evidence of further professional development, and Individual Teaching Plans (ITP).S

Perceptions of initial training

SPELD assessors and teachers are in the main satisfied with their experiences of initial SPELD training and registering.

> When I did my training there was a terrific amount of information, which was good because you can always look back on it. [SPELD teacher]
>
> I did a six month course for SPELD after a long career in secondary teaching. It was a very well organised distance course. I knew very little about dyslexia before my training—I was never trained to recognise it in my teacher training, which is a real pity. [SPELD teacher]

Professional development for current staff

SPELD teachers explained they are required to be re-certificated every three years, which entails them having to earn 36 points (at least 12 a year), covering different criteria. Some points are earned from professional development, some from completing a successful re-test, and some from presenting research. All are involved in keeping up to date with the latest research in the SLDs area. Different types of professional development are provided through the national annual conference, invited speakers, on-going workshops, area meetings and local committee meetings.

SPELD assessors attend the national conferences, but are also proactive in determining their own professional development needs and working with SPELD to provide these. One assessor explained how they had organised to have some recent updating on testing.

> As testers we went to SPELD and said, "We do seem to be working too much in isolation, and we need consistency in our testing". So now we are organising to work more together. SPELD is bringing out an expert from Japan to teach us advanced interpreting of data on the Woodcock Johnson. [SPELD assessor]

The research about SLDs and interventions is a rapidly changing area, and all participants agreed that SPELD seemed to be making great efforts to keep their teachers and assessors well informed through providing specialist professional development training.

> As assessors we have to do certain hours of professional development each year. This research field is moving so quickly, it's crucial we keep in line with it [Assessor].
>
> It's good—it's a helpful thing to keep up to date. [SPELD teacher]

There was discussion about the importance of keeping up with developments in the New Zealand Curriculum also, so that SPELD is not seen as out of date, but keeping abreast with mainstream education. SPELD teachers commented:

> We had four courses on maths a few years ago, when the new numeracy was introduced.
>
> We'd have maths advisors from the Teachers College come in to speak to us.
>
> A number of our professional development providers are practising teachers and we have to keep up to date with the NZC.

SPELD teachers and assessors perceptions of the professional development

The professional development provided by SPELD was reported by SPELD teachers and assessors to be excellent.

> It's the on-going workshops, attending the professional committee meetings and area meetings, and the close relationship with other SPELD teachers, that's so helpful. Like the Ron Davis thing the other night—there's more and more research coming through—you have to keep up to date. [SPELD teacher]

> We'd have in-house experts like Lois Wells come in to talk to us. There is a wealth of experience locally, and they [SPELD] require us to do 12 hours a year professional development, but most years I'd do 20 hours or more because there is that opportunity. [SPELD teacher]

SPELD teachers agreed that the five or six workshops a year were very valuable, and they appreciated the experts that were invited to talk to them. They also talked about the value of networking with other SPELD teachers at the area meetings:

> Building a network with other tutors is so helpful because we all swap ideas.

The annual conferences were spoken of very highly. An assessor said:

> SPELD is very good at running amazing conferences every year. They have amazing speakers. There is no other educational organisation that has such a wide range of speakers. They are constantly bringing in experts all the time. They do this really well.

Regional Variations in the provision of professional development

There seemed to be some variability between regions and SPELD associations in terms of the professional development and other initiatives provided. Christchurch was frequently mentioned as being particularly entrepreneurial and progressive. Another professional development initiative that has the capacity to expand the work of SPELD into the mainstream education sector was described by one SPELD teacher:

> We had a bit of a coup in Christchurch. We got a $10,000 funding grant, and we targeted the RTLBs and said 'please give us three students each', and we tested them, tutored them for six months and then re-tested them. The RTLBs have been big fans ever since.

As well as regional variation, there was a second qualifier raised about professional development provision, which was that while there was a lot of choice involved in what teachers decided to be involved in for their annual professional development, none of it was compulsory for everyone. This also has the potential for variability. The recent decisions about assessment tools to be used by assessors, was the only example spoken of where there was uniformity.

> None of our professional development is actually compulsory for everybody, except the WJ-III. However, all the conferences will have something about phonological awareness, written work, maths, and so on. [SPELD teacher]

Sector growth and recruitment

All of the SPELD teachers we interviewed were women of 50 plus, and several commented on the lack of younger SPELD teachers.

> We are a group of grey haired ladies at the conferences.
>
> Out of the 10 women at our last course, the majority would have been 40 plus. Some of our assessors are younger.

Others commented on a shortage of SPELD teachers.

> I'd love to see more teachers coming through to do SPELD. I'd be happy to give up some of my work to new teachers. We need a lot more teachers and testers.

The reason for this apparent shortage appeared to be financial reimbursement. SPELD teaching was not regarded generally as being well paid.

> It's not well paid—it's peanuts. You do it for the satisfaction. I charge most of my parents less than the suggested rate.
>
> SPELD teachers are very dedicated and willing, and while the money is helpful, you don't do it for the money. In the end you do it out of dedication to these children.
>
> Until we get a better funding system we won't get young people because they need to earn a living.
>
> You need a partner in full-time employment because we can only work for 30–35 weeks out of a 40 week school year. By the time you take out school trips, school camps and sickness you can be down to 25 lessons—and then you've got three months of school holidays, and I don't know of one family that wants tuition over the holidays, so you actually can't support yourself. I had 17 pupils by the end of my first year, and my earnings were about $11,000—and 17 pupils is full-time, because it takes an hour to prepare for each lesson.

There appeared to be a great deal of unpaid hours that women were doing for the hour's tutoring fee they were entitled to charge.

> I timed how long it takes to prepare for each new pupil. By the time you have taken to read the assessment report, to write the personal profile, to write the long term teaching plan, to write the term plan and to write the first teaching plan, it took eight hours. You're not paid for any of that.
>
> I'm not paid for the administrative work I do.

Another group of teachers discussed the hours of unpaid work it took to organise the professional development in their regional association:

> We're on the local committee and we spend hours and hours and hours working for nothing. It took mega hours to arrange the last conference we hosted.
>
> The local SPELD association is fairly small, so I'm on three committees doing voluntary work. One of the committees I'm involved in is organising a parents' education day. We

> teach them about dyslexia, self esteem, how to do contracts with their children, how to deal with schools, and kinaesthetic play.

Professional development on SLDs for the wider school sector

There did not appear to be SPELD policy about providing professional development for the wider school sector, but two participants told us about how they had contributed to this. One was a SPELD teacher who provided lectures to teacher educator students at her local university.

> I was invited as a guest speaker to talk to the students about dyslexia for three years at the University and it was interesting, because there were young people there who were not interested—they said those stupid children were just playing up, and there were those who thought OK well I have to sit here and listen, and then there were those who were immediately interested. I thought if I get a third of you aware of what you need to look for out there in classrooms, then that's good. This year, now that the government has recognised dyslexia, they told me it was part of the curriculum and I wasn't needed any more.

A SPELD assessor spoke about how she has provided professional development for classroom teachers through her local Teacher Education centre, and who now has good relationships with several of the schools where teachers attended.

> I rang up [Education centre] and said "Please can I run a workshop for teachers on dyslexia, because I think we need to do this", and then [One of the Universities] rang up and said they had heard it had been a success. So for me, I have had that wonderful opportunity now of delivering workshops, and if I was to do anything, I would like to do more of that, because that is where I think I have made an impact. There are certain schools round here now where those teachers who came to that course, now know what they are talking about and when they read the report, they understand it. I would like to do more of that.

Summary

SPELD NZ is interested to know how the participants in the study regarded its approach to building sector capability. We found that while there were reports of regional variation, most of the SPELD teachers and assessors we interviewed were highly impressed by the quality of initial training and the continued professional development they received. All agreed keeping up with the latest research was very important and SPELD conferences and workshops allowed them to do that, because international experts were continually invited to speak at these occasions.

One of the concerns from participants was about the low financial reimbursement of SPELD teachers, and the possible impact this is having on not attracting enough younger teachers to replace the present workforce of 'older women'.

There was one interesting finding that emerged, about the initiatives of two SPELD professionals to build capability in the wider school sector, because they saw this as important. Both had offered professional development to classroom/aspiring teachers, and had been well received.

8. Reflections on the implications of Phase One of the study

In this chapter we briefly summarise the main findings from Phase One of the study, and reflect on their implications, which may be useful for SPELD NZ to think about as they consider their future options.

Main findings and implications

The following findings relate broadly to the research questions.

We found the SPELD students who were the focus of our research were considered to be failing and well behind their peers in any or all of the literacy areas of reading, writing and spelling.

The fact that SPELD exists and that people use its services, shows there is a need in the mainstream schooling system.

The students we interviewed were mainly from high decile schools. We concluded that this was because SPELD costs parents fees for assessments and tutoring. This finding raised the question about what happens to the students who don't go to SPELD, and what proportion of students with SLDs never get picked up, because the costs are out of reach for many parents.

Our findings showed that for many parents, the process of getting some action from the school and finally placing their child with SPELD was often an ad hoc, lengthy, frustrating business. Many schools were not helpful about recommending additional assessments beyond Reading Recovery and only a minority suggested SPELD may be able to help.

This finding raised further concerns about the number of students with SLDs who were not getting help because of the unsystematic procedures in schools for further assessments and referrals. The long delays before students were being assessed was also worrying, especially when two or three years had lapsed. This raised a question for us about the level of expertise of classroom teachers in identifying and recognizing students with SLDs.

Participants' experiences of SPELD's interventions were in the main perceived to be positive, especially in relation to raising students' self esteem and confidence in learning. SPELD was perceived to achieve this through one-to-one tuition using interventions tailored to the students' needs, at a pace that matched their capabilities.

We were not surprised with this finding, because in most cases one-to-one, personalized learning situation should result in positive shifts, especially in raising self esteem.

Participants also perceived that SPELD interventions made a positive difference to students' achievement, even though for many students these improvements took a long time. Assessors were the only group of participants with assessment data to show shifts in achievement, and we found that because of the variation in assessment tools used to collect data in the past, it was reported there was wide variation in interpretation of results.

In Phase One we interviewed a very small sample of SPELD participants from a select group of SPELD teachers and schools. Until we collect achievement data on a larger scale, we cannot comment on the degree of progress students make during SPELD, or on the relative impact factors such as the number of lessons students have, the quality of their SPELD teachers, and the number of years spent with SPELD, might have on rates of progress.

There were components of the SPELD teaching programme which participants perceived to be strengths such as specialized teaching and focused learning times. There were also some areas where there was perceived room for improvement, such as a need for more collaboration between classroom teachers and SPELD teachers, and more shared understandings between assessors, teachers and parents.

While we agree that more collaboration between SPELD and the wider school sector would be productive, it raises questions of funding issues, responsibility for making it happen and requirements of time, goodwill and shared understandings from all partners. All of these are complex issues that SPELD on their own cannot solve.

SPELD participants believed their organization was doing a good job of growing specialist expertise among its members, with opportunities for keeping up to date with the latest research on SLDs. Participants did raise concerns about financial reimbursements not being attractive enough to recruit sufficient younger teachers however.

Findings from the surveys in the next phase of the research, will provide further information to supplement these initial findings.

Next step in evaluation

The findings from Phase One provide some initial information on how SPELD is perceived from a variety of perspectives and will inform the questions we develop for the surveys in term 4, 2009. In addition there are two more research questions to be answered in Phase Two, which are:

- Do the shifts made by SPELD students differ according to student characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, or initial achievement levels?
- Do the shifts made by SPELD students differ according to other conditions such as school characteristics, their SPELD teacher, or the process by which they are referred?

Data collected for these questions will help us respond to some of the issues already raised in the above summary.

Appendix A: Questions for SPELD student

(Individual half hour interview)

- ***Your strengths***

Do you like going to this school? What are the best things about it?

What things do you like doing most in class? What things do you like doing most at home?

What do you think you are best at doing?

- ***Tell your story***

1. Do you know why you go to SPELD? When you first started did you want to? Did you think you needed to? When did you start? Who decided and how did it happen? How do you feel about going now?

- ***Opinions on SPELD***

2. Since you have been attending SPELD, what have been the best things? Do you like your SPELD teacher? Why?
3. What is different about your SPELD learning compared to how you learn at school?
4. How has SPELD helped you in your learning? What are the most useful/effective things for you that help with your learning? Has it helped in reading, writing, remembering, etc? How?
5. Do you use these strategies and skills in class, or mainly just in SPELD time?
6. Do you think you have got better at reading? ***(****Evidence of shifts in* ***Achievement)*** What are your favourite books at the moment? Do you read them to yourself, or do you prefer someone else read them to you?

- ***Attitudes to learning / school***

7. How do you feel about your learning now? Do you feel more confident? Is the learning easier? Do you like learning more? (*What evidence is there of shifts in* ***attitudes to learning*** *for students who participate in SPELD?)*
8. How do you like having two different teachers—SPELD and classroom?
   What's…(good)….about it?

- ***Relationships with friends and family***

9. Do your friends know you go to SPELD?

10. Are your parents pleased with what you are learning at SPELD? Do you have to do lots of homework for SPELD and school? What's that like?

- ***Moving forward***

11. Do you think you will need SPELD for much longer? How long do you think?

12. Are there other kids you know who you think would be helped by SPELD? What sort of kids? How do you think SPELD would help them?

Do activity sheet and give thank you card.

(Read through with each student and help them fill in)

My name:

My age:

My School:

I am a girl / boy:

My ethnicity:

I have been going to SPELD for: _____weeks / months /years.

Appendix B: Focus group interviews with SPELD parents

(Cover ground rules—explain that the discussion that happens in the focus group will not leave the room or is told to other people.)

Tell your story

1. Tell us why and how you came to ask for SPELD's help? (– what happened at school and how and why you made the decision. Who was helpful or unhelpful at school—how did you find out about SPELD?)
2. How has SPELD helped your child?
3. Do you think this help could have been provided by the school? Why do you think it wasn't *(if appropriate)*?

Assessment

4. How useful and timely were the SPELD assessments?
5. Was this assessment funded by the school, or did you pay for this yourself?
6. Has this assessment been shared with the school and/or classroom teacher?

Relationships

7. How would you describe the relationship between your child and their SPELD teacher?
8. What about the relationship between your child and their classroom teacher?
9. How would you describe your relationship with both these teachers?

Achievement / attitudes

10. Have there been shifts in achievement for your child since starting SPELD? Are they better at….reading, writing, spelling, maths (*whatever they went to SPELD for)*? Has your child gone up any levels in their work? What have they been? *(Check out learning in general and literacy learning in particular)*
11. Do you know what skills, strategies, and approaches, are used by the SPELD teacher to help your child?
12. Which of these have made the most difference for your child?

13. Are you required to follow up on any of these things at home (for practice, reinforcement?)

14. Have there been any changes in your child's attitudes to learning since starting SPELD? Are they more confident, more motivated to do their work, more engaged, do they like learning more now, …what are these changes? *(Give examples)*

15. Has the SPELD intervention changed their attitudes to school? To their teacher? *(Explore the before and after changes) (Ask for examples)*

16. Have there been things that you think about differently or do differently at home since your child has been attending SPELD?

17. Does your SPELD teacher keep you well informed about your child's progress, and the skills, strategies and approaches that work best for his/her learning?

18. Does your child's classroom teacher work in with the SPELD teacher's ideas and interventions? Do they discuss your child together?

Other changes

19. How would you describe your child's relationships and behaviour at home, before and after starting SPELD.

20. Comment on any changes in your child's general confidence or wellbeing before and after starting SPELD.

Overall effectiveness

21. So in retrospect what would you say was your view of the overall effectiveness of the SPELD interventions?

22. Do you have any recommended changes for both SPELD and schools?

23. Would you recommend SPELD to other parents? What sort of parents and under what circumstances? Why?

Appendix C: Interview with SPELD assessor

(Gather demographic information about their previous training and qualifications, how long they have been working as a SPELD assessor, etc.)

Tell your story

1. How did you get involved assessment work with SPELD? What formal training did you have, and what theoretical perspective do you work from? What assessments do you generally use in your work with students? *(Explore theoretical background and what/who has influenced their work)*

Views on SPELD

2. What are the strengths and limitations of SPELD interventions, especially in relation to the wide range of learning/behaviour disabilities you see being referred?
3. Are your assessments timely enough for most of the students you see?
4. What are your views on the general standard of the assessments carried out by SPELD assessors?

24. What are your views about SPELD students' progress in general?

Evidence achievement / attitude shifts

25. How do you follow students' progress, and do you get to assess the effectiveness of the interventions you recommend?
26. What evidence do you see of shifts in achievement for students who participate in SPELD?
27. What evidence do you see of shifts in attitudes to learning for students who participate in SPELD?
28. So what components of the SPELD tutoring programme do you consider contribute to the most positive and effective shifts in student outcomes?
29. Do the shifts made by SPELD students differ according to student characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, or initial achievement levels?
30. Do the shifts made by SPELD students differ according to other conditions such as school characteristics, their teacher, or the process by which they are referred?

Relationships with parents

31. How important is the parent role in the on-going progress of students?

32. What is your role with parents? (Give specific examples)

Views on SPELD Teachers

33. How do you see your role in relation to SPELD teachers especially around how they respond to your recommendations about interventions, and the impact of these?

34. What is your view on the consistency of the SPELD teachers you have worked with, in terms of the variability of the quality and nature of their teaching?

35. What is the calibre and effectiveness of the types of professional development SPELD teachers and schools receive from SPELD NZ.

36. Do you have ongoing contact with teachers and students once assessment is completed. Who is responsible for recommending reassessment, and how often is this does. What is involved in this reassessment process.

How can SPELD be improved?

37. How effective are the activities designed by SPELD NZ to build sector capability (e.g., professional development, conferences) perceived to be?

38. What improvements need to be made to better position SPELD in the wider NZ education context, in your opinion?

Appendix D: Focus Group Questions for SPELD Teachers

(Cover ground rules—explain that the discussion that happens in the focus group will not leave the room or is told to other people.)

Teachers' stories

1. Tell me how you became a SPELD teacher, and why?
2. What did you do before that?
3. How long have you been a SPELD teacher?
4. How many hours a week do you do SPELD?
5. What do you see as your role?
6. What did you see as not happening in schools for these students? *(Explore the transfer to this type of teaching)*

SPELD Programme

7. Now tell me about how the process works for SPELD students. For instance, who decides first that a child might need SPELD, then what happens?
8. What role does the SPELD assessor play in shaping the SPELD teaching programme for the pupils? Give me examples from each of your students. How closely do you work with the assessor?
9. Describe the steps from assessment to teaching intervention. How often do you work with a child typically?
10. What are your views on the current SPELD assessment process—how effective is it? Do you receive ongoing contact and support from the assessors regarding progress of pupils? Do you think this is necessary? What would be better?
11. Who decides when reassessment is necessary for the student? How often does this happen?
12. What components of the SPELD tutoring programme do you see as particularly effective in contributing to positive shifts in student outcomes? (Generally and also for these particular students)

13. Do the shifts made by SPELD students differ according to student characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, or initial achievement levels?
14. Do the shifts made by SPELD students differ according to other conditions, such as school characteristics, their teacher, or the process by which they are referred?

The Students you tutor

15. Tell me about your experience of tutoring these particular students involved in the project.
16. What evidence is there of shifts in achievement for each student *(talk individually about their students)* as a result of their participation in SPELD?
17. What evidence is there of shifts in attitudes to learning for each student *(talk individually about their students)*as a result of their participation in SPELD?
18. Now tell me about your experience more generally of tutoring students with SLD in regards to shifts in achievement and attitudes towards school.

Relationship with schools

19. What are your relationships with each of the schools you are involved with? (explore principal, teachers—*one at a time)*
20. How are SPELD interventions regarded by these schools? *(give examples as above)*
21. What particular SPELD interventions and practices do schools consider most effective? *(give examples)*

Relationship with parents and students

22. Tell me about the relationships you have with parents, and students generally.
23. How about with the case study parents and students? (Give examples)

Views on SPELD

24. What are your perceptions of the training and professional development you are provided with by SPELD? How has this impacted on you?
25. How effective are the activities designed by SPELD, NZ to build sector capability (e.g., professional development, conferences) perceived more generally?
26. What are your views of the sustainability/future of SPELD in schools?
27. What do you think needs to happen?
28. What is different about SPELD teaching compared to regular literacy teaching?
29. What are the main advantages of working for SPELD in your opinion?

Appendix E: Questions for Focus group interview of Classroom Teachers of SPELD students

(Cover ground rules—explain that the discussion that happens in the focus group will not leave the room or is told to other people.)

(Gather information about how long these teachers have been teaching, how many SPELD students they have worked with, how long the students in the project have been with SPELD.)

Views on SPELD

1. What are your views about SPELD?
2. Does your school support or promote the use of SPELD teachers amongst its pupils? What are your understandings of the reasons why students are involved in SPELD?
3. Do you think there are more children these days needing this kind of specialist help? Why do you think this is the case?
4. Have you ever recommended a SPELD assessment to parents for their child?

1. ***Effectiveness of interventions***

5. What evidence is there of shifts in achievement for students who participate in SPELD?
6. What evidence is there of shifts in attitudes to learning for students who participate in SPELD?
7. What evidence is there of changes in behaviour, confidence or general wellbeing for students who participate in SPELD?
8. How do these interventions help the students you teach?
9. Do you and the SPELD teacher discuss these students and the interventions?
10. Do you also use these strategies, skills, approaches in your classroom?
11. Do you have a copy of the SPELD assessors report on the SPELD students in your classroom? How have you used this information?

12. Have you noticed any trends in students attending SPELD tutoring in terms of the skills they acquire or the difficulties they continue to have? What about over the longer term?

13. Which SPELD interventions do you consider to be the most effective in meeting the needs of SLD students in your class?

2. *How can SPELD improve?*

14. Are there any changes you could suggest to ensure SPELD better met the needs of these children?

3. *Other school based interventions*

15. Are there any other literacy interventions or programmes offered at your school to support students with SLD? How are these pupils currently assessed, and monitored? *(Prompt: How effective are they compared to the SPELD interventions?)*

4. *Relationships*

16. How would you describe your relationship with the parents of the SPELD students in your class?

17. Describe your relationship with the SPELD teachers and assessors.

18. What are your views of the three-way relationship between SPELD, the school, and the parents of SPELD students?

5. *Professional development*

19. Have you had any professional development provided by SPELD? How useful was it?

20. Would you like to know more about how SPELD operates and the interventions that they use? How do you think this could be useful to you as a classroom teacher?