

NZ research finds no advantage in learning to read from age five.

<https://www.otago.ac.nz/news/news/otago006408.html>

UK educational psychologist, John Noble, comments on this study:

"All state educated children in NZ are first taught by the language based methods of Marie Clay which are akin to Reading Recovery Methods used here. Using a picture vocabulary test to assess 'receptive vocabulary' as one of his 'controls', the study compared the later reading comprehension scores of about 50 children at 11 and 12 attending Steiner Schools (which also stress the importance of language methods) and State Schools. No differences were found at 11 and 12.

This study has absolutely no implications whatsoever for the first teaching of reading in the UK using synthetic phonics, because no such comparison was included in the Otago study. After working in NZ a couple of streets away from Otago University and having assessed some dreadful cases of all round literacy skills failure in the 2 Steiner Schools sampled in this study, as well as witnessed similarly appalling cases of reading and spelling failure in NZ state schools, I think we need to advise great caution in this country about proposals about precipitous changes in the timing of first literacy teaching derivable from this amateurish bit of research nonsense from NZ"

Simon Webb <http://homeeducationheretic.blogspot.com/2010/01/no-benefit-in-learning-to-read-early.html> also commented on this study:

"Another point to remember is that this is not exactly an unbiased piece of work. Sebastian Suggate was for years a leading light in the students' Anthroposophical Society at the university. He has always been a dedicated supporter of Rudolf Steiner's theories about education. In other words, he did not embark on this research in order to test whether children did better if they delayed learning to read until seven. Rather, he believed this firmly and went looking for evidence to support the hypothesis. That this is so can be seen from the wording he uses. He talks of the age at which children are, "*forced to start reading*"! How's that for objective, academic language? There is a lack of candour on the part of the man, as can be seen in this quotation from the New Zealand Herald. He is speaking of the apparent discovery that children learning later were not disadvantaged; "*Dr Suggate said he was surprised by his own findings that this was not the case.*" For a dedicated anthroposophist to make such a statement with a straight face suggests strongly that there is an element of deliberate deception involved."

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RRF message board January 2010.