

## News Release

### Movie-based programme a boost for struggling readers' literacy

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**Hollywood movies, often considered a threat to reading, have now proved to be a powerful ally.**

Researchers from the University of Canterbury's School of Literacies and Arts in Education have just trialled a US-based reading programme in six Christchurch schools. Struggling readers who took part in the programme improved their reading age by 1.2 years in just six weeks.

The patented programme, called Audio Visual Achievement in Literacy, Language and Learning (AVAILLL), is based on the use of movie subtitles to support literacy activities. Low achieving students in primary schools are enticed into books through "read-watching" of popular movies that are themselves based on books.

The programme builds on research undertaken in 1992 by UC Emeritus Professor Warwick Elley. Professor Elley analysed the results of the International Education Assessment study of reading literacy and discovered that heavy watching of subtitled TV for students in five of the top performing countries may be a variable that contributed to higher results.

AVAILLL was developed by Dr Alice Killackey, previously from Northern Arizona University in the USA, who has also overseen trials of the programme in Christchurch.

"Normally when people first read and then see a movie, cognitive dissonance can occur between both versions. In this programme, the students first read the movie and then see the book while practising imagery as they read," Dr Killackey said.

UC senior lecturers Jilaine Johnson and Faye Parkhill (Literacies and Arts in Education) were invited by Dr Killackey to act as research consultants while the programme was introduced in 23 classrooms in Christchurch.

Ms Johnson, who is the UC project leader, said the gains in reading comprehension levels, oral fluency and vocabulary knowledge from those who participated in the study had been dramatic, especially among minority and below-average readers.

"Many schools struggle to help minorities and below-average readers. AVAILLL taps into student strengths and gets them involved in reading within a media that they are so familiar with ie, the movie, and, by using text subtitles, takes away the fear of failure.

"Many children do not realise they are reading so much because it is 'fun' but certainly become aware of their improvement after two weeks on the programme," Ms Johnson said. "The AVAILLL programme engages students in learning; it literally 'hooks' them in and they desire to be involved. Because of its structure, AVAILLL has students reading at high concentration levels for one hour per day.

"To see children improve so markedly was startling. It raised participants' levels of self-esteem and gave struggling students self-belief in their ability to learn. Many of them had never achieved in their academic studies and this provided a boost to them and their families."

Ms Parkhill said the programme had huge potential to motivate students in becoming life-long readers."The AVAILLL programme may well have the potential to assist readers and learners in many education systems throughout the world."

She said she was particularly excited about the potential of the AVAILLL programme to reduce New Zealand's 20 per cent tail of reading underachievement that kept emerging in international comparisons.

"Results for Maori students from a bilingual class were particularly significant where these students made an average gain of 1.5 years in just six weeks."

Amanda Teear, who teaches Year 5-6 at Addington School, said thanks to AVAILLL children in her class had developed skills in fluency, imagery, comprehension, retelling in sequence, note-taking and dictionary use.

"The results in themselves were significant with an average class increase of 11 months in only six weeks.

"The true result was the instant ignition of pride the children showed in their reading and in themselves. They have now started to transfer this pride through to the rest of their curricula learning. They know they are successful readers and have the confidence to give anything a try because they 'can' read. This comes from results constantly being shared and celebrated with the class, parents and school community," Ms Teear said.

"For me, the true beauty of the programme was that it was delivered to a whole class of mixed ability children and it holistically catered for all learning needs in every session. It is powerful and fun."

In 2009, a larger study will occur to determine longer-term effects and wider use of AVAILLL to enhance reading programmes in New Zealand schools.

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