

Busting Barriers for Maori and Pasifika and Dyslexic – in search of the magic bullets

Ann Hartley, Chair of the Maori and Pasifika Educational Initiative (MPEI) remarked in an article printed by the New Zealand Herald,

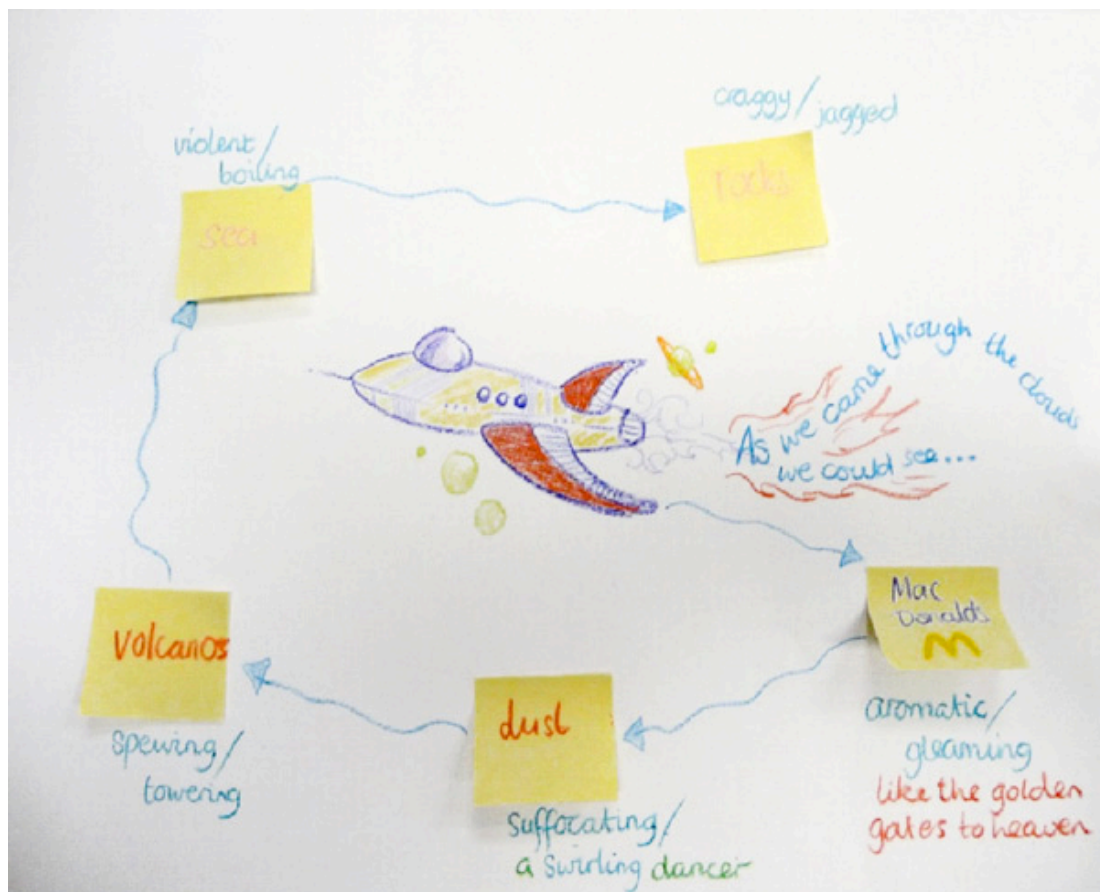
“It’s already clear that educational underachievement is unlikely to be overcome by a single silver bullet, but rather by a number of magic bullets.”

This article will identify magic bullets, which work in dyslexia aware classrooms across New Zealand and, taking the position "If it works for dyslexia it works for all students. "It will assess their potential benefit for Maori and Pasifika students who are not dyslexic but who may have certain preferred ways of learning.“

So we are looking for a number of magic bullets which work for dyslexics and which may also empower Maori and Pasifika students to work and achieve success in preferred ways and then, if they wish, to transfer these strategies to the public examination system.

- The motto of the Maori and Pasifika Education Initiative is “We speak for ourselves,” while the mantra of the Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand and its 4D initiative is “No student left behind”. So the first magic bullet is an increased emphasis on the importance of talking, sharing ideas and concepts and valuing these skills through formal assessment procedures. The key competency “Use of Language” is of particular importance in terms of the ability of both groups to “show they know” in preferred ways, despite currently weak traditional skills perhaps in spelling, sentence construction and paragraphing.

- The next magic bullet is a willingness to teach and assess across a range of alternative evidence of achievement – contributions to discussions, oral presentations, video evidence, mind maps, story boards, flow charts etc – without always requiring them to be written up in the form of sentences and paragraphs. When English is a second language or when thinking is faster than reading, it is important that students are given the opportunity to be assessed and given credit for higher order skills such as inference and synthesis through talking as well as writing.
- The third magic bullet is to use talk to transform preferential/alternative evidence into formal written evidence. Turning any form of alternative evidence into writing is a teachable skill, but one which is often implied or assumed in lesson planning rather than being explicitly taught as a technique.



The mind map above has been produced by a mixed ability group of older students, with one student scribing ideas onto post it notes on behalf of the rest. This means that students with vivid ideas and language and who may think and talk more effectively than they write are included in the process and their contributions add value to the group.

- “Chunking” – breaking lessons up into bite size chunks is the next dyslexia aware magic bullet. The beauty of planning for chunking is that each chunk requires talk in order to review what has just been done and prepare for the next bit. Something as simple as “Tell your partner three things you have discovered about.....” is a valuable technique as is “Next we are going to look at.....Tell your partner /group what you know about it.” **These “magic bullet” techniques will be presented along with a range of other inclusive classroom strategies during the DFNZ workshops commencing on 30th May 2010.**

The National Curriculum presents education as a journey, with individual entry and exit points. Te Marautanga Aotearoa emphasises the importance of starting points which are defined by a learner’s own knowledge, linking the new to the old and stressing the importance of personalisation, learning how to learn.

These approaches, translated into action suggest that much dyslexia aware best practice is also likely to be best practice for Maori and Pasifika students. The Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand seeks to empower all learners to be the best they can be and is proud of the links it has developed with Maori educators through the programme of workshops in 2009. So, to return to the question posed at the start, does getting it right for dyslexics mean we get it right for all? The answer must be a very positive and resounding “Yes!”

Notes about the author:

- Neil MacKay is an international consultant and trainer, with 28 years teaching experience in secondary and primary schools, specialising in inclusive, whole class approaches to Dyslexia
- Publications include “Removing Dyslexia as a Barrier to Achievement” launched in New Zealand in 2009 during Dyslexia Action Week. His latest book, “Leading on the Inclusion Development Programme” is now available. He is a contributor to “Dyslexia – Successful Inclusion in the Secondary School” by Peer and Reid, “Dyslexia in Context – Research Policy and Practice” by Reid and Fawcett and “The Routledge Companion to Dyslexia” Ed. Gavin Reid.~ Routledge Publishers 2009.
- For more information about Neil, go to:
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