What happens in reading instruction

In New Zealand students typically spend around five per cent of their time on specific reading activities.

- Compared to students in other countries, New Zealand students:
  - were relatively high in levels of reading proficiency but had lower average reading achievement
  - were more likely to hold positive views towards reading
  - were more likely to believe that reading is fun

The future of literacy

The PIRLS research highlights the range of performance in reading that exists in New Zealand. That is, within each group there were also some relatively low performing students. The government’s Literacy Strategy was introduced to schools in 2000, and it is probably too early to see the impact of its efforts on the PIRLS results. The strategy recognises that in reading it is more of a social or cultural outcome in the key to closing New Zealand’s achievement gap. It also recognises the need for teachers to have quality professional development for supporting a diverse range of literacy needs in the classroom. During 2001 and 2002 a number of teachers in each school received such professional development programmes that, if fully utilised, will play a major role in improving the literacy performance of New Zealand’s students.

In the classroom

PIRLS gathered information about factors in the classroom in order to understand the context around which students read. The main focus was on the approach teachers used to teach reading, as well as the time allocated for reading. The achievement difference was observed for Pakeha/European and Pasific students. The difference between the mean reading scores for those boys who had a good grasp of the skills and those boys who hadn’t was more evident for boys (50 point difference) than for girls (20 point difference).

Students’ love of reading

- Compared with their international counterparts, Year 5 students were consistently positive towards reading, but were more likely on a daily basis:
  - to read silently on their own;
  - to be read aloud to by their teacher;
  - to read along silently while another student read aloud;
  - to read silently on their own in class;
  - to read silently on a home computer;
  - to read on their own to prepare for an upcoming test;
  - to draw pictures or do an art project about what they’ve read.

Countries that participated in PIRLS 2001

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New Zealand’s participation in PIRLS

New Zealand participated in PIRLS in 2001 to compare our reading literacy progress with similar age children in other countries, as well as to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of our education system. The Ministry of Education prepared a survey containing 120 questions to be distributed to all primary schools in New Zealand. The survey was co-ordinated by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), PIRLS is a large-scale, international, comparative study of reading achievement that is part of a regular cycle of international student assessments.

The first survey was carried out in countries including New Zealand in 2001, and the next assessment in New Zealand is planned for 2006. PIRLS tests and questionnaires were presented separately from the group of students assessed in English.

New Zealand’s participation in PIRLS

New Zealand’s participation in PIRLS enables us to compare our patterns of reading instruction with similar age children in other countries, and as well as to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of our education system. For example, the number of years pre-primary education is the only country that has the only practice in all other countries, students that enrol in grades three or four. New Zealand’s participation in PIRLS provides us with educational information and data on primary and secondary education, literacy strategies, home and school experiences and the students themselves.

Ethnicity

Students reached the international Top 10% benchmark for reading literacy. All girls across all ethnic groupings generally achieved significantly higher scores than their respective male students. For example, Pakeha/European and Asian (567 and 560 respectively) generally performed well above the international mean (500). Pakeha/European and Pasifika (482 and 484 respectively) tended to achieve scores well below the international mean. Pakeha/European and Asian (567 and 560 respectively) generally performed well above the international mean (500). The biggest difference between mean scores was found for Pasifika students.

Home language

Students attending schools with a TFEA indicator in the 8 to 10 band generally achieved markedly higher scores compared with students in the 4 to 7 and 8 to 10 bands (290 and 275 respectively).

Language of the test

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Reading in the home

The home has an important role in fostering literacy. Access to books was not found to influence student reading achievement. Access to books was not found to influence student reading achievement.

Gender

In all countries, girls were more consistently better readers than boys were. New Zealand was one of the few countries where girls scored above the international mean for males, with a mean score for girls of 514 compared with 492 for boys.

Male students generally scored lower than females for all ethnic groups except Pasifika. In the United States, this was the case for all ethnic groups. For example, New Zealand girls (542) generally scored well above the international mean for girls (510). The range of scores for New Zealand girls was less than the range for most other countries. The range for New Zealand boys was wider than the range for most other countries. This is because the scores of students were presented separately from the group of students assessed in English.

PIRLS tests and questionnaires

All participating countries make contributions to the test and questionnaire design during the development phase. This is done upon agreement by all countries after a final test, which is conducted to assess primary schools at age 7. In Sweden, format change occurs at age 5 however, each year students at pre-school level after having spent more time in nursery school and year one core content. There were four reading tests in each country, a pre-primary test in the first one hour and a second one hour. A range of instructional strategies was used to compare children's reading and writing skills, as well as to compare the students' performance in the classroom.

About PIRLS

PIRLS aims to provide teachers, principals, parents and caregivers with information about the reading literacy skills and attitudes of middle primary school students.

Key findings: New Zealand in an international context

New Zealand students were less likely to achieve the international Top 10% benchmark of 615. Less than half of students achieving above 615, the international Top 10% benchmark.

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