

FACT SHEET - Literacy in New Zealand

The foundations for literacy are laid in the early years of a child's life. By the time they reach primary school they have already acquired many attitudes and understandings about language. They have all experienced success in learning and it is the schools and community task to ensure that learning to read and write is as natural and successful as learning to walk and talk.

It is essential that children are exposed to books from birth. Children's efforts in learning to read are greatly enhanced when there is *reading to children, reading with children and when children have the opportunity to read by themselves*. Many children in New Zealand do not have access to books in their homes. Some parents are poor role models, placing little or no importance on reading and learning. These are the children most at risk of failing to achieve in the education system.

Adult Literacy

Qualifications in NZ population - Significant improvements have been made in the percentage of the population with university degrees. This has doubled between 1996 and 2004. The percentage with no qualifications halved, however the lower levels of tertiary qualifications are experiencing greatest growth. 54% of tertiary participation was sub-degree level in 2002. Low levels of literacy exist in the workforce but this is falling- 41% in 1985, 32% in 1994 and 25% in 2003

Between 16%-19% of school leavers have no qualifications. A worrying trend if it continues is that the number of under 16 year olds granted permission to leave school, increased from 3% in 1993 to 21% in 1996 and 32% in 2000. Males contributed to 56%-58% of these.

Maori students with no qualifications are over represented, forming between 16%-18% of all school leavers but between 36%-39% with no qualifications. Pacific Islanders show similar statistics with 6%-7% leavers, yet 9%-10% with no qualifications.

Literacy Aotearoa, a provider of adult literacy services throughout the country, provided services to approximately 5850 adult learners in 2004 with over 230,000 hours of tuition given.

“The extent to which a lack of qualification impedes the progress of young people in the transition from school to work must be of major concern to a nation focusing on an inclusive, innovative economy”. Quote from Statistics NZ.

International Literacy Day

Altrusa is an international service organisation that works in communities around the world to improve literacy. September 8 was proclaimed International Literacy Day by UNESCO on November 17, 1965. It was first celebrated in 1966. Its aim is to highlight the importance of literacy to individuals, communities and societies. On International

Literacy Day each year, UNESCO reminds the international community of the status of literacy and adult learning globally.

International Literacy Statistics

This is a time to reflect on the fact that some 776 million adults lack minimum literacy skills; one in five adults is still not literate and two-thirds of them are women; 75 million children are out-of-school and many more attend irregularly or drop out.