



MEDIA RELEASE

DATE: MONDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2005
ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

New project has a vision for literacy

A new collaborative study showcased today in Hobart aims to throw light on literacy problems in Tasmanian school children.

Five to ten percent of primary school children fail to learn to read at the standard expected of their intelligence and educational and cultural background.

The 'Literacy Pathways' project has begun to screen for vision coordination problems among children with low literacy. Children who are found to have problems with their binocular vision, or eye coordination, will be invited to participate in an educational trial designed to improve their reading. The project is funded by the Australian Research Council.

One of the chief investigators, Professor Anne-Louise Ponsonby of the Menzies Research Institute, says that past research has shown that some children with normal intelligence may have reading problems because of problems coordinating both eyes to read visual images.

The proportion of children with low literacy who have reading problems due to poor eye coordination and the extent that this can be treated is currently not well understood.

"This project will evaluate the relative success of techniques such as traditional reading recovery, phonics programs and eye training exercises in improving literacy skills," she said.

Professor Allan Carmichael, another chief investigator and Dean of the University's Faculty of Health Science, says that the 'Literacy Pathways' project is the largest study of its kind in Australia.

Other institutions involved in this collaborative project include the Tasmanian Department of Education, the Faculty of Education and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute.

“Many variables can affect a child’s ability to learn. While the method evaluated by this study is not going to be a magic cure for all children with reading difficulties, we hope that it can make a real difference to children who have problems with their binocular vision,” Professor Carmichael said.

The study was showcased today at a morning tea to celebrate Research Australia's "Thank You" Day 2005, hosted by the UTAS Faculty of Health Science and the Menzies Research Institute. Researchers, volunteers, study participants and supporters bodies gathered to be thanked and in turn show appreciation for the amazing achievements of Australia's health and medical researchers.

All Australians are encouraged to get involved in ‘Thank You’ Day by sending a personal message of thanks to researchers on the website (www.thankyouday.org) or SMS a message to 0428THANKS (0428 842 657). The national series of events will conclude with the ‘Thank You’ Day Awards Dinner in Melbourne on November 7.

For more information contact:

**Jill Butterworth
Communications Coordinator
Menzies Research Institute
Phone 0409 705 278**

Information Released by:

The Media Liaison Office, University of Tasmania
Phone: 6226 2124 Mobile: 0417 517 291
Email: Media.Office@utas.edu.au