



## TRANSCRIPT

### Launch of FIVE from FIVE

Tuesday, 8 March, 2016, NSW Parliament House

**Speaker: Dr Jennifer Buckingham, Education Research Fellow at The Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) and Head of the 'FIVE from FIVE' Literacy Project**

Good evening, Minister Piccoli, Senator McKenzie, Professor Schwartz, fellow speakers, colleagues and friends.

I have been looking forward to this evening for a long time. It is wonderful to see so many familiar and new faces, including some children, which I think is a first for CIS. It's an exciting occasion.

What, then, is the point of all this?

I have been working at CIS for just over 17 years. One of the first tasks I was given was to update the CIS publication *State of the Nation*, which was a compendium of social and economic statistical trends.

As part of that work, I looked at trends in education. I noticed something that not many people had been talking about at the time – the educational achievement and attainment of boys had been declining.

One of the factors implicated was changes in teaching, especially in teaching reading. The decline in boys' reading skills coincided with a move away from explicit teaching of reading, including phonics, to the whole language philosophy. This change affected girls as well but their earlier language development gave them a buffer many boys didn't have.

Over the years since then, literacy has been a recurring theme, so much so that the teaching of reading became the subject of my PhD research. Literacy is the fundamental skill that underpins school success and has profound consequences for later life.

Tragically, a large number of children are not learning to read at a sufficient level for them to make good progress at school.

One international assessment, called the Progress in Reading Literacy Study, found that one in four Australian year 4 students did not reach the benchmark the study defines as 'the minimum proficient standard expected'.

When the same benchmark is applied to the Australian national literacy tests, the proportion of low-skilled readers is similar in other year levels. With close to four million students in Australian schools, this means there are as many as one million students whose literacy is low by international standards.

As Dr Kerry Hempenstall will explain shortly, there is an enormous amount of evidence on effective teaching of reading. The program is called Five from Five because this research has shown that children need explicit instruction in the *five essential components* of reading — phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension — in the first year of school when they are five years old.

The problem is that this research evidence is not reaching classrooms.

Five from Five is not a new program for teaching reading, it is a project to bridge the long-standing and damaging gap between research and classroom practice.

The Five from Five website which became public today will be the backbone of the project. It will be a much-needed independent and credible resource for teachers, principals, parents and policymakers, bringing together the best research and practical advice on teaching reading. It will grow and develop over time.

But a website is only useful if people know about it.

The Five from Five project will also include forums and roundtables, speaking at conferences and seminars, as well as getting the message out through traditional and social media.

There will be publications and reports, starting with the research report written by Kerry Hempenstall that was released just a few days ago, which has been very well-received.

Over the years, I have had the great fortune of meeting numerous people around Australia and around the world who have been working relentlessly, often swimming upstream, to try to improve this situation.

Their decency, dedication and fierce intelligence is humbling. As a result of that work, today we look forward and there is momentum for change.

The revised Australian curriculum for early years literacy more closely represents the appropriate focus and skill development that will lead to early success in reading.

Minister Piccoli and the NSW government have been national leaders in taking steps to improve teaching quality by setting higher standards for entry into teaching degrees, and demanding that universities equip teachers with evidence-based reading instruction methods, including but not only phonics.

While it is wonderful our politicians to be present, and indeed everyone else for being here this evening, don't think that turning up will get you off the hook. Tonight is the beginning.

If Five from Five is to achieve its aims, there must be a commitment to decisive action. Yes, there are many points of view about how to ensure all children learn to read, but not all have the weight of scientific evidence behind them.

Crucial to the Five from Five project are its supporters. It exists due to the generous financial support of five donors – Macquarie Group Foundation, Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation, Eureka Benevolent Foundation, Kate and Peter Mason, and Sally and Peter Crossing.

These people do not just write a cheque, as helpful and welcome as that is. They are also a source of personal and professional encouragement, while allowing me complete professional autonomy, and I am extremely grateful to each of them.

Five from Five is also creating an alliance of organisations and individuals who endorse the objectives of the project. So far, we have four official members of the alliance. A number of others are in progress. Thank you to the first alliance members for leading the charge, some of whom are represented here this evening.

While I am the face of Five from Five, a project and an event like this are never the work of one person. I would like to take a moment to thank some of the people who contributed to this project and to the launch this evening, either directly or indirectly.

My talented and hardworking colleagues at CIS are a pleasure to work with and pretend to be happy to hear from me at all hours of the day and night.

Thanks to Greg Lindsay and Jenny Lindsay, for getting behind a project that is the first of its kind for CIS.

Thanks also to my family and friends, who patiently carry the weight of my frequent absences.

Finally, thank you to Steven Schwartz for agreeing to chair tonight's proceedings, and to my fellow speakers. I am thrilled you are here and am looking forward to hearing what you have to say.

Ends