

Call for TVNZ To Add Subtitles To Home School Programmes

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Press Release: Ros Lugg

A literacy expert is calling on TVNZ to automatically include subtitles in its home learning TV programmes, saying a significant opportunity to improve literacy in children will be lost if it doesn't.

Christchurch-based Ros Lugg, a literacy and dyslexia specialist with 30 years' experience in New Zealand and the UK, says while some TVs have subtitle capabilities, they are optional and have to be turned on by viewers - many of whom are unlikely to be aware of the educational benefits of subtitles.

"That is why it is essential that subtitles are included when the content is made."

She says international research has found adding subtitles to children's programmes has a significant effect on literacy.

A study funded by PlanetRead, a global literacy initiative, found that the use of subtitles on TV doubled the number of functional early-age readers.

"An extensive two-year study in India looked at the progress of every Year One to Year Three child and found that subtitles had a measurable effect.

"For example, in one phase of the study, children at 10 schools were shown animated stories with subtitles three times a week for a year. At the end of that period, these children were found to have an average reading score about 70 percent higher than children at schools where subtitles were not used."

Ms Lugg says subtitles have been shown to improve vocabulary, word recognition and comprehension. There is also a benefit for second language learners, which is particularly significant for supporting Te Reo Māori in New Zealand, she says.

"Researchers overseas have found that a vast majority of children are drawn to sub-titles when they appear on-screen, which allows them to create a link between the words they are seeing and the words they are hearing.

"The home learning programmes that are being made are fabulous, and I appreciate that they are being produced under exceptional circumstances. But there is an opportunity that will be lost if they are not enhanced by automatically including subtitles."

Ms Lugg says New Zealand has attracted widespread admiration for its response to the COVID-19 situation from a public health perspective, and there is growing admiration for how the education system has responded.

“This crisis, in some ways, can be seen as an opportunity as far as literacy is concerned. Many parents will have had more time to become more involved in their children's learning, sharing books and watching programmes together. However, there's one other factor which would be particularly beneficial for literacy and that's the automatic inclusion of subtitles in these new home learning TV programmes.”

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