

Recently I assessed a 6-year-old girl, named Sue P. Sue's school Learning Support Teacher (LST) had recommended that Sue be assessed by a Speech Pathologist.

The LST and Sue's class teacher were concerned about Sue's lack of progress with phonics and early reading.

When Mrs P brought Sue to see me, many interesting details came to light.

Sue has a late December birthday, and as such has always been the youngest in her class.

Towards the end of preschool, Mrs P had been concerned about Sue's readiness to enter year 1. However, all the preschool teacher's assessments indicated that Sue had coped well with preschool and had achieved all the prerequisite skills to enter school.

Sure, she was a little bit immature in some areas, but she was the youngest in the class, after all. Mrs P was assured that all would be fine.

But, at the end of year 1, the same dilemma arose. Should Sue go on to year 2, or should she repeat year 1. You see, Sue hadn't progressed very well at all with her early literacy development.

Mr and Mrs P were extremely concerned. As such, they took Sue to a Guidance Officer for Assessment

. These assessments indicated that Sue had normal intelligence, though she did make some errors related to her auditory skills. This supported the results of her class teacher and school LST.

At this point Sue's parents brought her for a Speech Pathology assessment. Sue was assessed over two one hour sessions.

The first session was used to find out all the background information pertaining to Sue's development and her difficulties. Assessment of Sue's literacy skills was begun during this first session. The second hour was used to complete the literacy assessment and to assess Sue's language skills.

The results of the literacy assessment showed that Sue had extreme difficulty isolating the individual sounds that make up words. Sue also had much difficulty knowing that words are made up of smaller parts (syllables).

In fact Sue had scored below preschool level in her abilities in these areas. But, she had successfully completed preschool, and had just finished year one.

What does all this mean?

The skills which Sue has difficulties with, fall into the category of "Phonological Awareness". Good Phonological Awareness allows us to break words into



smaller parts (by syllables and sounds) and to isolate and manipulate these smaller parts.

You can see how good phonological awareness is a prerequisite skill for successfully developing reading.

What happens to Sue now?

Sue would benefit enormously from attending Speech Pathology to work on developing her phonological awareness skills.

A program such as the "Sound Training Activities for Reading and Spelling" (STARS) would be ideal. Mr and Mrs P agreed, and Sue will be attending the 10 week program. Sessions are once per week in a small group and homework activities are given each week.

With all of the information Sue's parents collected on her readiness to enter year 2, they have decided that Sue will repeat year 1 in 1998.

Attending the "STARS" program and repeating year 1 will set Sue in very good stead for improving her early literacy skills to an age appropriate level. This will mean a much more satisfying time academically for Sue. In the future she won't find reading "hard" and unpleasant.