

Media release
13 April 2007

World renowned scientist in literacy dies

The University of Auckland joins with people throughout New Zealand and around the world to mourn Professor Dame Marie Clay, the developmental scientist who died today aged 81. Dame Marie's outstanding research work on early literacy learning, continued for over 50 years, won her international renown.

From her doctoral studies in the 1960s emerged reliable tools for assessment of young children's literacy learning. Her pioneering work in developing Reading Recovery in New Zealand and its successful transference to many other countries has justifiably won her international recognition. Reading Recovery now operates in most English-speaking countries and has been redeveloped in Spanish (USA), French (Canada), and Danish.

Dame Marie has been called "the Michael Jordan of reading" for changing the face of primary school literacy instruction. She received numerous international awards for her work along with five honorary degrees from overseas universities. The Marie Clay Endowed Chair in Reading Recovery and Early Literacy was established at Ohio State University in 2005.

Dame Marie was educated at The University of Auckland and became its first woman professor in 1975 and the first woman head of an academic department. She was made a Dame Commander of the British Empire in 1987 and awarded the title of "New Zealander of the Year" in 1994.

Professor Stuart McNaughton of The University of Auckland today paid tribute to Dame Marie's achievements. "Marie exemplified the finest qualities of a scientist, teacher, writer and researcher. Her research included how children learn about reading and writing before they start school. She labelled this 'emergent literacy' which is now the way the world understands early development."

A memorial service for Dame Marie will be held at the University's Maidment Theatre, 8 Alfred Street on Thursday 19 April at 10am.

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