

Computer program combats dyslexia

Arwen Hann
Education reporter

An American neuroscientist says a computer program which slows down the spoken word could help dyslexic children.

Ian Creese, a professor at Rutgers University in New Jersey, said the programme called FastForWord had helped thousands of American children improve their reading and language skills.

It is based on the principle that children with dyslexia and other learning difficulties have trouble recognising language at the same speed as everyone else, which can lead to reading problems.

The computer program slows words down and draws out the syllables to help children understand them.

Once the sound has been learned the words are repeated at increasing speeds until the child can distinguish them at normal speed.

Creese, who visited Christchurch

last week to talk about the program, said he was surprised New Zealand had not recognised dyslexia until last year, given that most other countries had recognised the condition for some time.

However, he warned against putting the same label on all dyslexic children.

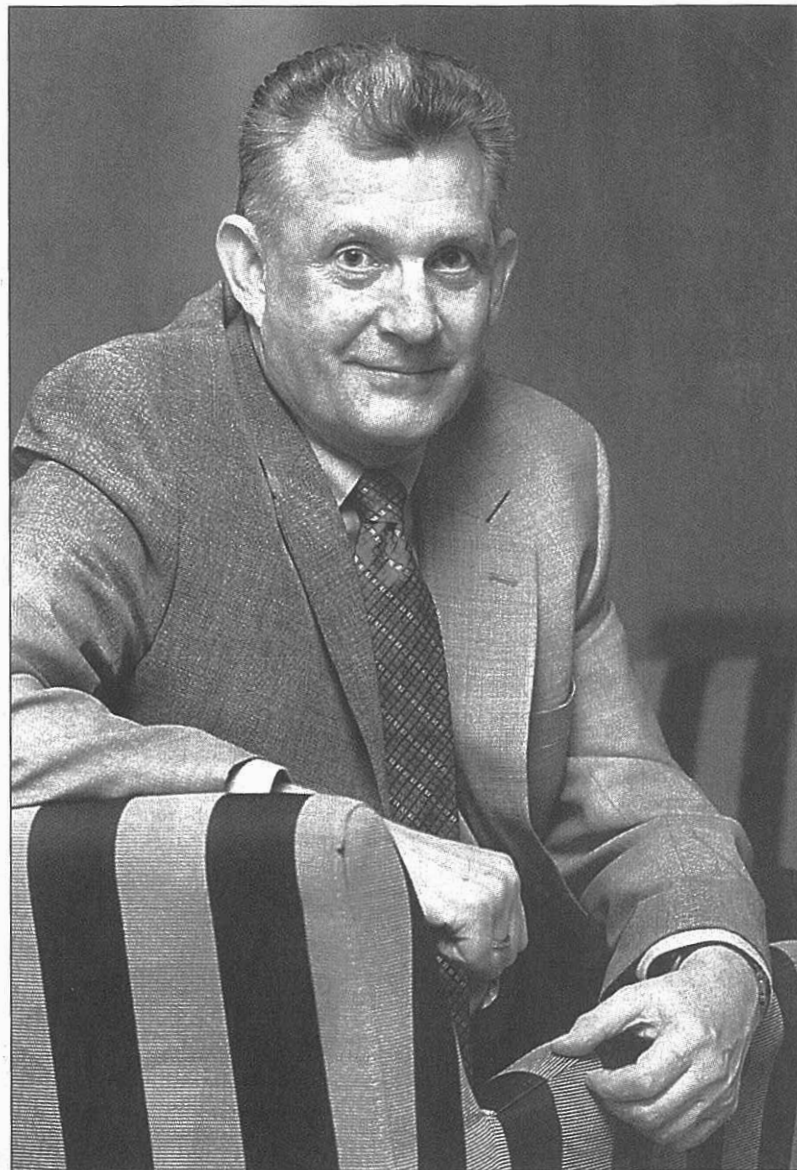
Scientific studies showed that people with learning difficulties did not process the sounds the same way as other people.

"MRI scans show that most people use the left side of the brain for these processes but dyslexic people do not and cannot cope with fast-changing sounds," he said.

"Further studies have shown that the FastForWord programme, which is based on these scientific principles, can help to develop and change that part of the brain.

"There is nothing about New Zealand that means that it could not work for children here," he said.

The Education Ministry officially recognised dyslexia in April 2007.



Learning tool: American neuroscientist Ian Creese says a computer program has been developed to help people with dyslexia. Photo: Dean Kozanic