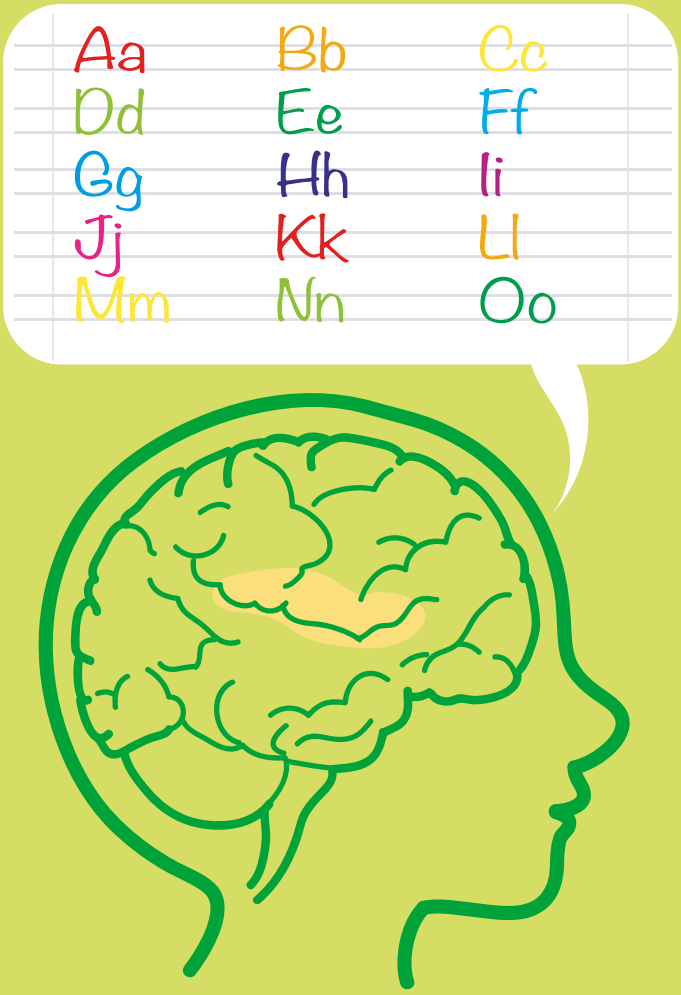
Learning Difficulties Australia | Volume 51, Nos 2 & 3, Summer 2019

Bulletin



On phonics, phonemic awareness and dyslexia

From the President

Lorraine Hammond

In recent times, I have heard a number of references to the impact of individuals on change. They often refer to water: "individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean" and "the fall of dropping water wears away the stone." Perhaps it's time to take stock of the reach we are collectively having in promoting evidence-based practice.

In 2019, LDA hosted Dr David Kilpatrick in five Australian states to a total audience of about 1300 participants. David is a conduit of research that can be difficult for teachers to access and which he excels at making understandable. In his talks he explained the importance of 'sight words' as a goal, not a strategy and made explicit the precursor skills required to learn to read and how best to teach them.

At the same time Emily Hanford, a senior education correspondent for APM Reports and producer of the audio documentary *"Hard Words: Why Aren't Kids Being Taught to Read?"* released *"At a Loss for Words: How a flawed idea is teaching millions of kids to be poor readers"*. Emily, who is a member of DDOLL, drew attention to the challenge for teachers whose pre-service training has left them ill-equipped to teach reading. Her easily accessible and engaging podcasts have found their way into many inboxes and raised awareness amongst educators and the wider community about the need to prepare teachers who understand the science of reading.

Last year, *Sharing Successful Practice* conferences took place in Melbourne and Sydney. Hosted by schools who privilege high impact instruction, these low cost events, held during school holidays, were attended by over 500 teachers and featured sessions by researchers, academics, school administrators and teachers who volunteered their time to share their knowledge and expertise in effective instruction. So far, *Sharing Successful Practice* conferences will go ahead in Perth, Melbourne and Geelong.

Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean.

Finally, Emeritus Professor of Cognitive Science, Max Coltheart reminded those of us who subscribe to *Developmental Disorders of Language and Literacy* (DDOLL) about growth in membership to this online forum. When it began in 2003, DDOLL had 132 members. As of October 2019, it has 1102. The aim of the DDOLL group is to disseminate information about the investigation and treatment of developmental disorders of language and literacy that uses sound scientific methodology and evidence-based research. Members include teachers, parents, practitioners concerned with children's reading difficulties, reading scientists and others. There are members in the UK, Canada, New Zealand, Singapore, USA and elsewhere, as well as Australia and many are researchers who willingly explain their work. To subscribe to DDOLL contact: *max.coltheart@mq.edu.au*.

There is no shortage of evidence-based practice to teach reading, but we need a better marketing campaign. There are so many ways for teachers and those who work with students with literacy based learning difficulties to engage with this research. Please send a link to a colleague and be that drop in the ocean.

LDA's President, Dr Lorraine Hammond AM, is an Associate Professor at the School of Education at Edith Cowan University. Lorraine divides her time between research projects on high impact instruction, teaching pre and inservice teachers, supervising higher degree students and writing and delivering professional learning for The Kimberley Schools Project. Lorraine is the Chair, Deputy Chair and Board Member of three high performing schools in WA. Lorraine has been a member of LDA Council since 2010 and has previously served as President and Vice-President.

Emily Hanford's podcasts are available from: https://www.apmreports.org/story/2018/09/10/hard-words-why-american-kids-arent-being-taught-to-read;

https://www.apmreports.org/story/2018/10/08/what-to-do-if-your-childs-school-isnt-teaching-reading-right; and

https://www.npr.org/2019/01/02/677722959/why-millions-of-kids-cant-read-and-what-better-teaching-can-do-about-it

Council news

Sustainability Review

In February 2019, LDA began to consider a review of its operations in light of the demands on members of Council and the need to ensure a sustainable future for the organisation. Council selected consulting firm Explicate to undertake the review, which involved an analysis of current and historical LDA records, a comprehensive survey of current members of LDA, and face to face or telephone interviews with Council members and past presidents of LDA.

Council formed a sub-committee, the Sustainability Review Committee, to consider the outcomes of the review and chart a path forward. The Committee first formally accepted the report, and began to consider its recommendations. A major recommendation of the review, and one that the Committee and then Council endorsed, was a decision to seek a growth model for LDA that would involve increased turnover through memberships, professional learning and other revenue raising, on the understanding that this undertaking would require additional paid administrative and management support.

In August, Kerrie McMahon, LDA's long-standing administration officer, informed Executive that she would be resigning from her role from 31 October. Mindful of the Sustainability Review's recommendation to increase paid administrative support for LDA's operations, a recruitment panel was convened to identify a suitable person to take on the role in a 0.5 FTE capacity. Julie Hermansen accepted the position, commencing with a handover from Kerrie in late October. Council extends its sincere appreciation to Kerrie for the dedication and efficiency she has demonstrated in supporting LDA, and welcomes Julie Hermansen to the new, expanded role.

The Sustainability Review Committee will continue its work in considering and implementing as appropriate the recommendations of the review. Some areas for consideration include governance processes, Council and committee structures, the possible role of a General Manager, website function and design, membership expansion and expanded online professional learning. Should constitutional change be required, Council will seek expert advice. The Committee has committed to keeping Council and LDA membership informed of deliberations and decisions throughout 2020 and beyond.

Professional Development

Meanwhile, throughout the year, Treasurer Pye Twaddell and members of the Professional Development Committee were busy organising and promoting a tour by Dr David Kilpatrick, a US-based psychologist, academic, author and expert in reading difficulties. During this very successful tour, Dr Kilpatrick presented to appreciative audiences in Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Cairns and Sydney. The focus of his seminars was the role of phonological processing and its importance in supporting orthographic mapping to achieve efficient word reading. Promotions of this important tour were assisted by the very active work of Council member Renae Watkins, who has taken responsibility for the recent social media drive to share LDA's message more widely and effectively. Also very successful was the Queensland LDA-SPELD- LSTAQ joint conference, with LDA's contribution and promotion driven by Nicole Todd. The Consultants Committee has also provided professional learning to consultant members and a wider audience throughout the year, ensuring that quality information to support students with learning difficulties is provided to teachers, parents and policy makers.

Other LDA activities

LDA continues to communicate with its membership and the wider research and educational community through its flagship academic journal, the Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties, and through the Bulletin, the eNews, the website, and the LDA Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter accounts.

The Awards Committee was delighted to invite Mona Tobias Award recipient Dr Jennifer Buckingham, Bruce Wicking Award recipient Mr Steven Capp, AJLD Eminent Research Award recipient Professor Bill Tunmer, and Rosemary Carter Award recipient Jan Roberts to receive their awards at a ceremony after the 2019 AGM on 26 October. Each of the awardees gave a fascinating presentation which was appreciated by all those in attendance.

Meanwhile, LDA president Dr Lorraine Hammond, Associate Professor at Edith Cowan University in Perth, was appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia (General Division) in recognition of significant service to higher education and the community. She has since been invited to serve on an AITSL (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership) taskforce reviewing initial teacher education to ensure that graduate teachers are fully prepared for effective early reading instruction. Throughout the year, LDA has continued to pursue collaboration and co-operation with support organisations including AUSPELD and advocacy groups such as Code Read to improve awareness in the community around learning difficulties.

LDA Council, on behalf of LDA members, remains strongly committed to its core purpose of assisting students with learning difficulties through effective teaching practices based on scientific research. To continue that work, LDA welcomes its new Council for 2019-2020: Dr Lorraine Hammond (President), Dr Nicole Todd and Dr Molly de Lemos (Vice Presidents), Renae Watkins (Treasurer), Ann Ryan (Secretary), and ordinary members Sarah Asome, Lyn Franklin, Kate Gurjian, Juanita Lee, Dr Bartek Rajkowski, Dr Sally Robinson-Kooi, Dianne Steele and Jo Whithear.

This report on Council News was prepared by Wendy Moore, the outgoing LDA Secretary and Convenor of the Administration Committee for the 2018-2019 Council. We thank Wendy Moore for her contribution to LDA over the past six years, initially as Convenor of the Publications Committee and Editor of the LDA Bulletin from September 2013 to September 2018, and over the last year as Secretary and Convenor of the Administration Committee.

Welcome to Michael Roberts

LDA welcomes Michael Roberts, LDA's new General Manager..

His appointment follows the review of LDA undertaken last year, which recommended that LDA adopt a growth model that would involve increased turnover through memberships, professional learning and other revenue raising. This model required LDA to seek the services of a General Manager, whose role it would be to guide LDA through this process of change.

Michael comes to LDA with over 23 years of experience as an educational leader. This includes experience as a school principal and as a senior advisor of a large network of schools across South-East Asia where he led the integration of the Singapore and Australian curriculum across all schools. He was also the Executive Director of the Good to Great Schools program, a program that supported the use of effective teaching through direct instruction, and the Executive Principal of the Arcadia Group of schools which support disengaged youth. In 2017 he was one of only two school principals to serve on the influential Gonski *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence*.

Michael is a strong supporter of evidence-based practice based on the scientific evidence of what works,

particularly in the case of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and we welcome him to LDA.

In this Bulletin

This issue of the Bulletin focuses particularly on issues relating to phonics, phonemic awareness and the use of the term dyslexia. These are all core issues in the debates about how best to teach reading and to monitor reading progress, and how best to support students with reading difficulties. Jennifer Buckingham and Kevin Wheldall argue the case for a national Phonics Check, Stephen Parker argues the case for synthetic phonics versus analytic, analogy and onset-rime phonics, and Ros Neilson looks at the phonics versus phonemic awareness debate. Moving on to the use of the term dyslexia James Chapman and William Tunmer consider the question as to whether the use of this term leads to effective and equitable practices in supporting students with reading difficulties, Steve Dykstra explains why the term dyslexia is not used to identify a specific disorder in the area of reading in the DSM-5, and Peter Westwood reflects on the changes in the terms used to identify students with various types of learning needs over the years. This issue of the Bulletin also includes the presentations of recipients of the LDA Mona Tobias Award, the Bruce Wicking Award and the Rosemary Carter Award, with Jennifer Buckingham reflecting on the difficulties of bringing about the changes required to implement effective reading instruction for all children, based on the scientific evidence of what works, Stephen Capp outlining the road he followed in adopting evidence based practices in his school, with a particular emphasis on his recognition that catering for learning difficulty is synonymous with what is simply best practice for all children, and Jan Roberts reflecting on life as an LDA Consultant.

We apologise to our members and readers of the LDA Bulletin for the delay in the publication of this issue, which is in fact a combined issue including both Issue 2 and Issue 3 of Volume 51, and will endeavour to maintain our normal schedule of Bulletins for 2020.

We welcome the submission of articles from LDA members and others with an interest in learning difficulties for possible inclusion in upcoming editions of this Bulletin.

Please submit articles, correspondence about the Bulletin, or letters for publication to the editor. For questions about content, deadlines, length or style, please contact the editor. (Email: *molly.delemos@gmail.com*)

Articles in the Bulletin do not necessarily reflect the opinions or carry the endorsement of Learning Difficulties Australia.

Requests to reprint articles from the Bulletin should be addressed to the editor.

An interview with David Kilpatrick

Ros Neilson interviews **David Kilpatrick** in Melbourne during his busy 2019 Australian speaking tour for LDA. They talk about Aussie rules, Asian Fusion, and making sense of reading.

David Kilpatrick and his wife Andrea met with a group of LDA members before his scheduled full-day Melbourne workshop, on the Sunday afternoon of what could otherwise have been a quiet weekend off in the middle of his busy Australian speaking tour during August 2019. David had kindly agreed to spend some time telling us about his own professional history for the benefit of readers of the LDA Bulletin. It was delightful to find in this interview context that David shared his ideas with the same energy, conviction and informal charm that he demonstrated when he was presenting the whole-day workshop sessions – the same qualities, in fact, that a few of us had witnessed when he had been trying to make sense of new experiences like Australian Rules football at the MCG and Asian Fusion restaurant fare on the previous day. David's enthusiasm just didn't seem to tire.

David Kilpatrick is a Professor of Psychology at the State University of New York College at Cortland, where he teaches courses to school psychologists covering educational psychology, children with disabilities and learning disabilities. He has also practised for many years as a Certified School Psychologist. As he recounted how he had developed an interest in literacy, it seemed that it was the practising school psychologist speaking to us rather than the academic. He recounted that he had been introduced fairly early in his career to the research literature that pointed out the importance of phonemic awareness as a component of literacy development. He told a story of how, one year when his school had run out of funding for Reading Recovery teachers, he put into practice some of the ideas he had learned from reading the academic research, and continued this project, together with the teachers in his school, for a five-year study. As he put it, it was a case of school psychologists and teachers recognising that there was a problem, rolling up their sleeves, and simply doing some of their own research. What he noticed in his own school at the end of that study was a striking reduction in the number of students who presented as continuing referrals for reading difficulties – a reduction that paralleled the effects reported by the formal researchers. One of David's professional mentors, Philip McInnis, confirmed his school-based observations. David's wife Andrea contributed her experience of the same phenomenon: she taught mathematics in Upper Primary classes, and she, like so many other teachers, had felt at a loss when so many of her students had difficulty with reading. It was a revelation for her, too, simply to put into practice some of the skills that David was talking about.

David said that he developed his theoretical position on the need for advanced phonemic awareness to facilitate orthographic learning as he studied the research literature, initially reading the literature through the lens of Linnea Ehri's research on orthographic development and David Share's self-teaching hypothesis of learning to read new words. He mentioned that his 2015 book, *Essentials of Assessing, Preventing and Overcoming Reading Difficulties*, published by Wiley, had originally been aimed at school psychologists – he had been trying to make what he had learned about the relevant research accessible to his colleagues in his own discipline. He confessed that he was surprised when the book reached a much wider audience, including teachers, administrators, speech-language pathologists, and other special educators. The frequent guest speaker requests he has received since the publication of his book have seemed to surprise him. He commented that it seemed all to be happening to him, rather than something that he was pushing for himself.

David... developed his theoretical position on the need for advanced phonemic awareness to facilitate orthographic learning as he studied the research literature

David's point about the range of professionals from different disciplines who were interested in his book led to a wider discussion. There is no one discipline that covers the field of reading teaching and reading research, and given the complexity of the area and the huge volume of the available research, specialisation is obviously necessary. David spoke about hoping to increase the opportunities for universities to gain access to experts in teaching reading who could offer courses within a range of disciplines. The LDA members present at the interview, who themselves represented a range of disciplines, fully agreed with the point he was making – there are great challenges and opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration in the area of literacy.

David confirmed that, as is the case with many readers of this LDA

Bulletin, his whole working life has been carried out in a context where constructive philosophies that support Whole Language teaching have been the norm. A very positive development to which he has contributed in the American context is the establishment of *The Reading League*, an organisation originally formed by members of the *Scientific Society for Studies of Reading*. The aim of *The Reading League* is to influence classroom teaching, with the motto 'As we know better, we do better.' The organisation advocates evidence-based reading instruction and systematic teaching by providing on-line information links and recommended resources, conducting monthly FaceBook Live Events, holding an annual conference, and providing a library of YouTube videos of professional education events. LDA Bulletin readers will find the link – *https://www.thereadingleague.org* – very useful.

… there are great challenges and opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration in the area of literacy.

Thanks to David and Andrea Kilpatrick for coming to Australia to share their ideas and resources, and thanks to the LDA Executive and volunteers for making it all happen.

Dr Ros Neilson is a Speech-Language Pathologist working in private practice as a consultant and researcher. She specialises in early literacy and reading difficulties, with a focus on the nexus between oral language and literacy.

Award Presentations following the AGM

Presentations to the recipients of each of the LDA Awards, as well as the AJLD Eminent Researcher Award, followed the 2019 AGM on 26 October. Each of the recipients made a brief presentation following the acceptance of their Award.

The recipient of the LDA Mona Tobias Award, **Jennifer Buckingham**, reflected on the difficulties of bringing about the changes required to implement effective reading instruction for all children, based on the scientific evidence of what works. The summary of her presentation is provided on pages 8 and 9 of this Bulletin.

The recipient of the LDA Bruce Wicking Award, **Steven Capp**, outlined the road he had followed in adopting evidence-based practices in his school. He drew particular attention to the need to recognise that intervention should not be seen as separate from good practice, and that catering for learning difficulty is synonymous with what is best practice for all children. He also noted that the process of coming to understand the research into learning difficulties had provided him with a better understanding of how ALL children learn, and that by applying a similar systematic approach to the teaching of mathematics as had been applied to the teaching of reading had led to similar improvements in mathematics achievement at his school. The summary of his presentation is provided on pages 10 to 11 of this Bulletin.

The recipient of the LDA Rosemary Carter Award, **Jan Roberts**, reflected on life as an LDA Consultant. The summary of her presentation is provided on pages 12 to 13 of this Bulletin.

The recipient of the AJLD Eminent Researcher Award, **Professor William Tunmer**, provided an overview of his most recent work on the cognitive foundations of learning to read, which provides a framework designed to help reading professionals better understand what their students are facing as they learn to read in alphabetic writing systems. It is argued that what is needed to help intervention specialists achieve better outcomes is a clearly specified conceptual framework of the cognitive capacities underlying learning to read, which will provide the basis for an assessment framework that is linked to evidence-based instructional strategies for addressing the literacy learning needs of struggling readers. Like the simple view of reading, the Cognitive Foundations Framework aims to build a broad understanding of what is cognitively required for learning to read, laying out the relationships between the cognitive requirements. Further information on this conceptual framework is provided in his article, co-authored with Wesley Hoover, published in the May issue of the *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties* (Volume 4,No 1, pages 75–93).

The mission to improve reading instruction – How can we achieve success?

Jennifer Buckingham, recipient of the 2019 LDA Mona Tobias Award, reflects on the difficulties of bringing about the changes required to implement effective reading instruction for all children, based on the scientific evidence of what works.

Mona Tobias was a remarkable person. She directly and personally improved the quality of life of many children and families through her determination to ensure that their disabilities did not prevent them from receiving the education they deserved.

Many of the previous recipients of the Mona Tobias Award are people that I have had the great fortune of working with in some context or another over the past decade or more, and to whom I have looked many times for inspiration and guidance.

The truth is that I am just standing at the pointy end of the boat. There are a lot of people doing the hard work of rowing who have been at the oars for much longer than I have, so I am going to take this opportunity to acknowledge some of them and give an account of the way some important policy developments have come about over the past decade or so, and reiterate how important LDA and the people associated with it have been.

Louisa Moats' reports published by the Fordham Institute were a revelation to me. Chester Finn Jr's preface to Louisa's report *Whole Language Lives On: The Illusion of Balanced Reading Instruction* published in 2000 says this about reading instruction: "No domain has been studied more intensely. None has yielded clearer and more definitive findings about what works and what does not. Yet no domain is more vulnerable to the perpetuation of bad ideas and failed methods".

The research underpinning systematic and explicit reading instruction made so much sense to me, but I was lucky; I didn't have a deeply embedded set of misguided beliefs about education that needed to be unpicked in order for the evidence-based arguments to take hold.

> Early reading success is implicated in every other educational issue. If children can't read, education is elusive.

The inquiry into boys' education in 2000, which was initiated as a result of a paper I wrote for The Centre for Independent Studies, introduced me to MultiLit and to Kevin and Robyn Wheldall. My path crossed with Kevin and Robyn on various occasions after that, including via our mutual friend Noel Pearson, on whom Kevin has had a profound and lasting influence.

As Kevin said in his Mona Tobias speech, "since literacy underpins everything in terms of future success in school and beyond, it is our greatest hope for ensuring a 'fair go' for all Australians regardless of their social background."

When I took up the role of schools editor at *The Australian* newspaper in 2004, *The Australian* had just published an open letter to Brendan Nelson by 26 academics and reading specialists, exhorting him to take action to improve reading instruction in Australian schools, many of whom were associated with LDA. The letter led to the National Inquiry Into Teaching Literacy, chaired by Ken Rowe.

The report from the Inquiry published in 2005 gave a strong endorsement to the findings of scientific research on reading. It was well received (with the usual exceptions) and its findings were reinforced by the Rose review in the UK the following year.

What happened next? In Australia, we had a change of minister in January 2006 and none of the NITL recommendations were put into action. In England, however, the government moved decisively to mandate systematic synthetic phonics in every primary school, supported by quality teaching resources. Imagine if even one state education minister in Australia had had the fortitude to do that in 2005. We might be in a very different position to where we are now.

When I returned to CIS I realised that all of my policy research work kept looping back to reading and literacy. Early reading success is implicated in every other educational issue. If children can't read, education is elusive.

When the opportunity arose to do a PhD project with Kevin and Robyn, I jumped at it. We wrote a paper called 'Why Jaydon Can't Read', which was part literature review, part policy analysis and part call-to-arms, and many people responded, some in public ways and others within their own sphere of influence.

It was that response that led to the creation of the FIVE from FIVE project. The launch of the Five from Five project, which involved ministers and senators,

as well Kerry Hempenstall and Jackie French – demonstrated that what it was trying to achieve was not just the obsession of a fringe element.

The Five from Five publication that set out the case for introducing the Year 1 phonics check that is used in English primary schools was influential in the Phonics Check being included in the federal government's policy platform in 2017. Molly de Lemos was an invaluable source of guidance.

Pamela Snow and Mandy Nayton, as well as this year's Bruce Wicking Award recipient Steven Capp, joined me on an expert panel to provide advice to the federal minister on the introduction of a Year 1 literacy assessment. The South Australian government, under two smart education ministers, was persuaded to run a trial and subsequently make it a bipartisan state-wide policy. A NSW trial is scheduled for 2020.

The phonics debate organised by Five from Five was another important event. Anne Castles participated in that debate against a high profile team, but ultimately the weakness in our opposing team's case provoked many influential people to finally acknowledge where the strength of evidence lies.

… perhaps the most fraught frontier in our collective mission to ensure all children receive high quality evidence-based reading instruction (is) initial teacher education.

This 'highlights reel' shows the importance of the collaboration that is facilitated by LDA. On that note, I must also mention the value of the DDoLL email network started by Max Coltheart – a giant among giants in the field of reading research.

At the moment, I am involved in what is perhaps the most fraught frontier in our collective mission to ensure all children receive high quality evidence-based reading instruction: initial teacher education. Lorraine Hammond is joining me on a task force appointed by the federal education minister, for which the recent report published by MultiLit through the Five from Five project was the catalyst. Education Council, which comprises all state and territory and the federal education ministers, approved the working party's recommended changes to the ITE accreditation standards at their meeting on December 12, 2019.

Unfortunately, this mission to improve reading instruction so all children learn to read is constantly being hampered by people determined to preserve the status quo. Reform of policy and practice is hard work and hard won.

Chester Finn, Jr. wrote, "The path to consensus via science is rarely straight; it can take years to achieve and the battles can be bloody. But eventually, the accumulation of evidence is hard, even impossible, to ignore." We have to believe that and never give up.

Jennifer Buckingham is Director of Strategy and Senior Research Fellow at MultiLit and founder of the Five from Five project.

Mona Tobias was a trained primary school teacher who was subsequently appointed, in 1937, as the sole staff member of the newly established Physically Handicapped section of the Correspondence School in North Fitzroy. In this role she became known for her pioneering work in developing programs to meet the needs of children with learning difficulties, and particularly the needs of children who had been affected by the polio epidemic of that year. On her retirement at the age of 65, with support from SPELD Victoria, she undertook a course on learning disabilities under Sam Clements at the University of Arkansas, and subsequently took charge of the private remedial clinic Gould House. In this work she exerted a very considerable influence on primary teaching in Victoria. Many thousands of teachers came voluntarily to be instructed by her and many hundreds of children owe directly to her their rescue from the despair of failure. She also inspired many hundreds of parents to provide intelligent support for their learning disabled children. In spite of illness and failing eyesight she continued to see children in her own home until her final admission to hospital in 1980.

How one school made the transition to evidence-based practice

In his acceptance speech for the 2019 Bruce Wicking Award, Steven Capp, Principal of Bentleigh West Primary School in Melbourne, outlines the road he followed in adopting evidence-based practices in his school.

To be awarded the Bruce Wicking Award is very special. The honour I feel is growing with my understanding of the contributions that Bruce Wicking and his family have made to education and more broadly the contribution that LDA has made to countless communities around Australia.

I am relatively new to the principalship of Bentleigh West and to LDA, and I believe my experience highlights a problem in the profession, particularly relating to how we are initially trained as teachers in university teacher training courses.

I have been drawn to LDA in my pursuit of evidence-based practice, something driven by a need to achieve better outcomes for all students and guided by sheer luck in meeting with Sarah Asome, our reading intervention specialist, on my appointment to Bentleigh West Primary School in 2015.

I believe that my experience of not understanding the evidence relating to initial reading instruction is a reasonably common one, and that understanding the evidence should not be left to chance. I would like to briefly share our story to highlight the importance of organisations such as LDA to make the evidence accessible to instructional leaders to enable them to use evidence-based practice to support instruction for ALL students in every classroom. I would also like to share key successes that were transferred from our reading instruction experience to other subjects such as mathematics.

At Bentleigh West Primary School, the road to evidence informed instruction started with reading.

I had been working in some schools in disadvantaged areas and the learning data that I was analysing showed large percentages of students well below the expected level in reading and spelling. I had assumed that disadvantage was almost entirely to blame for these results, and that disadvantage was a major obstacle to learning to read.

… catering for learning difficulty is synonymous with best practice…

However, NAPLAN data at Bentleigh West indicated that 15 to 20 per cent of students were performing one year or more below the expected level in reading and spelling at Grade 3, with an increase in this percentage by another 5 to 10 per cent at Grade 5. Bentleigh West has significantly less disadvantage than my previous schools, leading me to shift my attention to instruction being a factor in poor reading outcomes.

My thoughts on instruction being the problem were confirmed in discussions with Sarah when she outlined the importance of oral language, the role of phonemic awareness in reading success, and the missing ingredient of systematic explicit instruction in phonics, along with fluency and vocabulary, that lead to skilled reading and good reading comprehension. The big six of reading.

She further explained that we had good Tier 2 and Tier 3 reading interventions in place but that our Tier 1 approach, based on a balanced literacy program, did not match. I was curious as to the impact on our high performers if we changed our Tier 1 instruction. Sarah suspected it would improve or have no impact on their performance.

The answer to many of our reading and spelling issues seemed quite simple: design our Tier 1 model to systematically and explicitly teach important elements of reading, including phonics, to align with our Tier 2 and Tier 3 approaches. However the big six was somewhat new to me and I had barely heard the terms phonemic awareness and phonics, let alone acquired the knowledge as to how to systematically and explicitly teach this content, and to lead teachers in this area. If this was true for me, an experienced educator who had risen to the position of principal, I was almost certain it was true for every teacher at Bentleigh West and perhaps Australia!

We began building a vision to have every teacher at Bentleigh West trained as expert teachers of reading and spelling and to have the knowledge and understanding to support any child that walked into their classroom.

We would start at understanding systematic, synthetic phonics and explore what explicit teaching meant to our teachers.

Evidence informed reading instruction was to become our complete, whole school focus.

We implemented training in systematic synthetic phonics teaching and sought advice on constructing

scope and sequences via organisations such as the Australian Dyslexia Association and Yoshimoto OG.

We changed our assessment practices by moving away from multi-cuing and running record assessments, and implemented DIBELs and the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check to better understand how well we were teaching this content, and also to cut down on assessment time.

I immersed myself in the training that the teachers were receiving and in familiarising myself with the reading research, so that I could more ably make sound decisions around resourcing and development and how best to support courageous teachers integrating new knowledge with new teaching skills all at once. I felt the need to be with them and to share in the failure, success, fear and frustration that inevitably occurs when professionals push for improvement. I needed to keep the focus and the belief that the cause was worth it, as our students were the beneficiaries, and to get reading right can change life trajectories in line with our Victorian DET initiatives of closing the gap.

In reading the Rose Report I noticed the references to the Simple View of Reading, which provided one of the best frameworks I have seen to help guide our work. The simple view of reading is based on the formula RC = D x LC. That is, reading comprehension (RC) depends on both decoding (D), which enables students to convert written text to spoken words, and language comprehension (LC), which is the ability to understand the spoken language.

We felt that we now understood how to develop both word level reading and to implement practices that supported the development of comprehension. These practices included rich text exposure and discussions.

Our goal of understanding explicit teaching of systematic synthetic phonics was part of the decoding element and decoding was about accurate word reading. Language comprehension was about understanding what was read. Both these areas need to fire in the brain and support each other to bring about skilled readers.

Explicit teaching was another area that we needed to ensure was implemented consistently throughout our school. Observations undertaken by our teachers indicated inconsistencies in our practice that were contrary to an explicit teaching model.

We reached out to Dr. Lorraine Hammond who transformed my view of teaching in one powerful day of professional development when she took us through the art of explicit instruction and the mountain of evidence that supports it. This led us to seek out readings on Cognitive Load Theory and Rosenshine's principles of instruction, and to design professional development to support the momentum that Lorraine had given us. At last, we had a consistent teaching model to subscribe to and we were beginning to see that systematic and explicit teaching in most areas of the curriculum was resulting in enhanced learning growth. Our maths team was also adopting similar changes in their teaching practices, so that this enhanced learning growth was also evident in our maths results.

By 2018, we had a cohort that had been exposed to four years of evidence informed reading instruction. This Year 3 cohort had also received systematic explicit instruction in mathematics. The Year 3 NAPLAN results were really interesting to us, in order to check whether our internal assessments and observations aligned with a standardised test that was comparable to schools within a similar context.

The results were outstanding, and we saw higher results than like school groups in almost all areas. These results are summarised in Table 1.

These results have led to much interest and collaboration with many schools and have contributed to sharing success and learning with others.

In conclusion, I have mentioned the names of some esteemed researchers and members that are part of or associated with LDA. I haven't mentioned the countless others whose work I have read that has built my ability to know more and to be a better principal. To sit next to Anne Castles and to receive awards with Professor William Tunmer, and also to meet and converse on a semi-regular basis with Professor Pamela Snow and Jennifer Buckingham, is something I treasure.

The work that LDA does is inspirational and we need to work together to ensure that all practitioners cease to see intervention as being separate from good teaching and to understand how the research into learning difficulties has provided us with a better understanding of how ALL brains learn.

Our brains are more similar than different and catering for learning difficulty is synonymous with what is simply best practice.

I am humbled, honoured and grateful for receiving the Bruce Wicking Award from LDA who have already contributed so much to my professional learning.

Steven Capp is the Principal of Bentleigh West Primary School in Melbourne, which has become recognised for its adoption of evidence-based teaching practices, particularly in the area of reading. He has worked across the primary and secondary school sectors as an educational leader for the past 15 years. He has a Masters of School Leadership from Melbourne University and has worked with schools and across Australia in bridging the gap from research to practice. He served on the expert advisory panel to the Federal Government for Year 1 Literacy and Numeracy Checks in 2017.

Year	Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar and Punctuation	Numeracy
2011	470	440	424	456	434
2012	465	442	435	460	422
2013	457	446	432	457	410
2014	465	420	433	446	433
2015	472	447	436	469	442
2016	459	441	429	478	437
2017	467	453	438	497	452
2018	496	473	498	527	496

Table 1 Bentleigh West Year 3 NAPLAN Results, 2011 to 2018

On being a Consultant Member of LDA

Jan Roberts, recipient of the 2019 Rosemary Carter Award, reflects on life as a Consultant member of LDA.

It was a great honour to receive this award in memory of Rosemary Carter, my friend and a much loved consultant. I thank my nominators and others who supported me in this nomination. I often wish I were younger but age has given me extra opportunities to fulfil the criteria for the award. I will take you down the path that led me to my current work and share a few of the things I do as a typical LDA consultant.

After three years of teacher training and with memories of structured phonics, Cuisenaire and implied explicit teaching, I spent two energetic years at Kinglake West Primary School in a country infant room, with 28 Preps to Grade 2 children plus two extra Preps mid-year. My class included Maureen, who was severely brain damaged and Tony, who strangled my budgie and was probably home damaged. Back to the city with straight Preps was a breeze with a blissful year in a suburban 'country infant room'. I then retired and produced four sons, and often took my two youngest to work as an emergency teacher. How things change! Returning to study psychology and remedial education led to a change.

I moved to Templestowe High School for the next fifteen years, classroom teaching to Year 12 and managing the special needs programs for students with learning difficulties as well as ESL and gifted students and the integration of students with disabilities. While there, I completed a BA in English and then a Graduate Diploma in Special Education, specialising in learning difficulties. Two years or so as a Victorian Education Department curriculum consultant gave me the opportunity to deliver teacher training. A Kafkaesque promotion as a consultant in maths (my weakest subject) saved me from having to train teachers in Whole Language and stick to primary maths. What a lucky background for my future career, having taught from Prep to Year 12, including special needs and also delivering PD.

In 1995, I retired (again) to take up tutoring and also, for many years, Certificate 3 training of integration aides. I became a consultant member of LDA, then the Australian Resource Educators Association (AREA), and was persuaded by Rosemary Carter to be the Convenor of the two day millennial conference in Melbourne in 2000. After that I became a member of LDA Council and later also served as Convenor of the Consultants Committee. This whole connection has been an amazing journey until this year when I retired from council.

In the early days of tutoring there was not the easy access to good resources that we have today, so I developed a structured phonics program. Being at the height of the Whole Language era, it had little hope of acceptance as a reading program so I focused on spelling. Later, with the help of Dr Saskia Kohnen, I updated this program to include synthetic phonics. I have continued to develop other resources for teachers. In 2001, ACER published *Spelling Recovery* and also sold rights to the UK publisher David Fulton. This led to plenty of PD work, particularly with ACER, which was very helpful while building up my tutoring business. At that time LDA support for consultants was particularly strong, as it is now.

Selecting programs to tutor students with learning difficulties is still a challenge as most students have very particular needs, and one program is rarely perfect in its entirety, if at all. Consultants are often reshaping programs, like orthodontists, or filling holes, like dentists. For example, while many students have learned some

digraphs they frequently do not know the single vowel sounds, maybe from insufficient exposure or perhaps because, for some students, these letter sounds are phonologically difficult to distinguish from each other. Invariably, they think that short /ă/ says /ŭ/, possibly from slowly reading *'This is ŭ* [sic] *dog'*. It is very rewarding to be able to find ways to improve students' knowledge of the structure of words, such as VCV and VCCV, and extend their vocabulary and comprehension in reading.

One spelling strategy is teaching learners to sound out (not spell out) most words while writing. For example, Johnnie, aged 10, wanted to write *'interesting'* but spelled out *'-I-N-T-S-I-N-G'*. When he was asked to sound it out, he wrote *'intresting'*, which was close enough for spell-check to fix, and indicated some progress on the way to learnimg the correct version through exploring syllables, base words and suffixes.

Consultants are often reshaping programs, like orthodontists, or filling holes, like dentists.

Students with learning difficulties are generally not good metacognitioners and need to be taught how to be analytic and use mnemonics. An effective strategy for a difficult word to spell is to identify the tricky bit and then think of a way to remember it, for example by creating a story from initial letters, as in the case of: *'because'* (Big elephants crush ants under small elephants); or *'does'* (Does [an] octopus eat seaweed/sausages/sandwiches?). But there are limits to the number of such stories so other strategies must

be employed, such as sounding out a tricky word as it is spelled, not spoken, eg. *frī-end*, *prĕtty*, *făst*, *w-rite*, *disting-ū-ish*. Some teachers find using the analytic, multisensory CHIMP (the **Ch**unk, **I**nvestigate, **M**emory screen, and **P**ractise) strategy effective to memorise a very difficult word.

Tutors need to be adaptable. Most senior students need comprehensive strategies, and to achieve success (a learning aphrodisiac), we might need to guide them step by step through their set school work, modelling essay structure, text analysis, and editing and vocabulary, and reinforcing basic skills in the context of reading, so that they start to hand work in, do better in assessment tasks and gain confidence. In the process of reshaping and fine-tuning we employ much gentle pushing wrapped in TLC.

The job of tutoring can become complex, with the needs of the student, parents, teachers, and other professionals to consider. Also, students might come for one thing, but we find that something else, often maths, requires urgent attention. And in the environment of one-on-one, consultants sometimes unearth the basic problem. Take Max, now in Grade 6. He did well in Grade 5 NAPLAN maths but in Grade 6 he wasn't finishing tests and was making errors. Because Max has learning difficulties, which camouflages his intelligence, teachers might have assumed that he is just a bit slow in general. But it transpired that Max worked out everything mathematical in his head - a very handy skill - but was inaccurate due to overload. He had no idea how to do written calculations and must have tuned out when these were being taught in class, relying on his knowledge of the basics. But once he understood the convenience of the four written processes he put his mind to learning them and now says that he is utilising them when appropriate. Max is quite an inspiration.

The role of the Consultant as a tutor is satisfying in many ways - satisfaction from helping hard working students, many lovely parents and teachers and the connection with LDA. There are financial challenges, especially in the beginning: no assured pay, no employer superannuation contributions, the cost of attending PD and having to cancel sessions, insurance, equipment and resources. It is a bizarre anomaly that parents can't claim medical rebates on our services as they can with speech and occupational therapists, who also teach, although there is some access to NDIS funding.

The job of tutoring can become complex, with the needs of the student, parents, teachers, and other professionals to consider.

There is irony in being tutor. You lose clients if you don't succeed but you also lose them when you do, which is of course our aim. I try for rapid success-related redundancy but my wand is rarely magic and occasionally, almost loses its mojo. I don't have all the answers and achievement is mostly due to focused effort from everyone involved.

Effective support for students with learning difficulties, as well as their families and teachers, depends on the continuing learning and collaborative commitment of all of us in our different spheres of influence. As long as I have my passion, compassion and competence, I will do my best to live up to Rosemary Carter's example and the criteria of this award.

Jan Roberts is a long standing Consultant member of LDA, who has served as President of LDA and as Convenor of the Consultants Committee. She has been an active member of the Consultants Committee and the Consultant network support groups, and has contributed to the ongoing support of Consultant members through professional development and other support activities.

The Rosemary Carter Award was established in 2018 in recognition of Rosemary Carter's enormous contribution to the education of young, struggling students, and to the wise and valuable support she provided to parents and to colleagues over many decades. Rosemary Carter was a longstanding member of LDA and served as LDA's Referral Officer from 1991 to 2002 and as Convenor of the LDA Consultants Committee from 2002 to 2008.

Why all states and territories should follow South Australia's lead and introduce the Year 1 Phonics Check: An update

In this article, **Jennifer Buckingham** and **Kevin Wheldall** argue the case for a national Phonics Check.

The proposal to introduce a Phonics Check — employed in schools in England towards the end of year one — into Australian schools has created considerable controversy. It has been said that it would prove stressful to young children and is unnecessary, because phonics is already taught adequately in most Australian schools as part of the literacy curriculum.

The South Australian (SA) government commissioned a trial of the utility of the Phonics Check in 2017 and, on the basis of the trial's finding, decided to implement the Check in all state schools in 2018, with non-government schools joining the program in 2019.

The results of the trial allayed many of the reservations about the Check and confirmed the need for its introduction (Hordacre, Moretti, & Spoehr, 2017). The second state-wide implementation last year showed that some improvement had already occurred but also demonstrated that many children were still struggling with phonic decoding – a foundational skill for reading.

What is the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check?

The Phonics Check consists of 40 single words children read aloud to a teacher. There are 20 real words and 20 "pseudo words" — all of which can be read using phonic decoding. The pseudo words are included because they can't be read from sight memory and are a purer test of phonics ability.

In SA the Check was done in August, when children had been at school for a little over 18 months. The timing of the Check was based on a recommendation from a ministerial advisory group to the federal government.

Many students have very low decoding ability after 18 months at school

The SA state government decided to set the threshold score at 28 marks out of 40 for the state-wide implementation in 2018 and 2019. The 28 mark threshold was set using two criteria: 1) while the threshold score in England is 32, the Check is given later in the school year than the SA Check so more content will have been taught to English children; and 2) benchmarking of the items in the Check against the National Literacy Progressions. The threshold score is the minimum expectation, and given that the Check is not unreasonably difficult and that approximately 16% of children obtained a score of between 36 and 40 in the trial, a high score is achievable and should be the goal.

The headline data from the 2017 trial showed that the majority of children in year one found the test items difficult.

The report shows approximately 33% of children achieved a score above 32. By comparison, 81% of year one students in England achieved this score for the past two years (UK Government, 2018).

Teachers and school leaders were overwhelmingly positive about the Check

According to the SA trial evaluation report, teachers and leaders observed: "…students did more poorly than expected, across the board. Numerous respondents reported feeling surprised and disappointed by the results based on students' known reading abilities and results on the Running Record."

This is a clear indication that existing assessments in these SA schools were not providing an accurate measure of students' decoding abilities.

The way the data are reported in the 2017 trial evaluation report does not allow a calculation of the proportion of children who achieved 28 out of 40 — the threshold score set for the 2018 implementation. The trial evaluation report showed that around 44% of children achieved a score above 26. In the 2018 implementation, 43% of students achieved the threshold score of 28 or above, and in 2019 it was 52% (Government of South Australia, 2019).

Research on the Phonics Check with Year 1 children in NSW has shown that following one year and three terms of explicit synthetic phonics instruction, the proportion passing the 28 out of 40 criterion was far higher than was found in South Australia — more than 80% (Wheldall, et al. 2019). This shows that a high level of achievement in the check is possible with quality phonics instruction.

In the SA trial, the distribution of student scores was very different to the distribution of scores in England. In SA, student scores were distributed on a bell curve. English student scores are skewed to the right of the distribution. This means most children in SA scored around the middle, whereas most children in England score at the higher end. In many English schools 100% of students achieve the threshold score. This level of data is not available for the 2018 or 2019 assessments in SA.

Three ways South Australia's phonics check is different to England's

The Phonics Check in SA employs the same word items used in various years of the English Checks. But there were methodological differences in how the checks were conducted in SA and in England, which may cloud the comparability of the results obtained.

1. The font. Teachers raised the issue that the font used in the Check was different from the standard font used in SA schools. But by the end of year one, children will have encountered many different fonts in books and elsewhere. It's unlikely this will have been a major factor influencing performance on the Check.
2. Timing. In England, the Check is given to students about a month before the end of year one (after nearly two years of initial instruction). But in SA trial, the Check is given earlier, in term three. The SA students had about a term less to learn letter sound correspondences, and this needs to be kept in mind, and it is reflected in the lower threshold score.
3. The "stopping rule". More significant was the decision to advise teachers to discontinue testing once a child had made three consecutive errors. This stopping rule has the potential to deflate scores on the Check, because students who had been stopped might have gone on to answer a few more questions correctly. The evaluation report also found that the stopping rule was not consistently applied. However, it's unlikely that many children failing three items in succession would be able to achieve the threshold score of 32 items out of 40. The NSW research mentioned above (by Wheldall, et al, 2019) has demonstrated that the application of the stopping rule makes very little difference to the score achieved. A stopping rule is not part of the standard conditions used in England, although teachers do decide to stop children if they are struggling. As many as 41% of teachers have been found to do this (Walker et al., 2015).

Students liked it

The report of the SA trial was very comprehensive and gathered process information as well as student results. Teachers and leaders in the trial reported that all students responded positively, including struggling readers, and that they were engaged and interested. There were no reports of anxiety or stress for students. Teachers "universally" commented that students "loved the one-to-one time with the teacher".

The Phonics Check was reported to be a "good eye-opener for teachers", and widely seen as complementing rather than duplicating existing assessments

Teachers and school leaders were overwhelmingly positive about the Check. The feedback from teachers and school leaders in the trial was encouraging and positive about all aspects of the administration of the Check and the information it provided, including:

- the sufficiency of training and support materials
- the ease of administration
- the length and duration of the Check for young students
- the engagement and effort of the students, and
- the usefulness of the data it yielded on student reading abilities, for the purposes of guiding instruction and for identifying and supporting students who "may otherwise be slipping under the radar".

The Phonics Check was reported to be a "good eye-opener for teachers", and widely seen as complementing rather than duplicating existing assessments.

What should happen next?

In spite of the differences in methodology compared with the Phonics Check in England, it's unlikely that their combined effect could account for such a difference in performance between the two. SA's results suggest that there is little room for complacency about the state of phonics teaching in SA.

Almost all teachers in the trial said that they taught phonics using either synthetic or analytic methods, reflecting the claim that Australian teachers already teach phonics. But there was no information to verify that phonics teaching is systematic or explicit, and these results clearly suggest that they don't teach it well enough.

Even more significantly, the trial has provided strong support for implementation of the Year 1 Phonics Check across Australia

The SA trial and implementation of the year one Phonics Check has been an important initiative. The evaluation report was a valuable guide to changes that needed to be made for a state-wide implementation, and this has been done carefully.

Even more significantly, the trial has provided strong support for implementation of the Year 1 Phonics Check across Australia. Or, at the very least, for other states and territories to conduct similar trials. The NSW and Tasmanian governments have announced trials to be conducted this year.

The trial supports the findings of the expert panel for the Australian government (Buckingham et al., 2017), and has validated the arguments of advocates that the Phonics Check gives teachers vital information about decoding skills not gained from other systemic assessments, and is neither

burdensome for teachers nor stressful for students (Hammond, 2017).

However, an assessment will not of itself improve student learning. For improvement in children's reading ability to occur, systems, schools and teachers must respond to the results of the Phonics Check and improve their teaching practice accordingly.

Dr Jennifer Buckingham and Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall, now both with MultiLit Pty Ltd, are well-known researchers, writers, and speakers in the field of literacy. This is a revised and updated version of an earlier article that first appeared in The Conversation at www.theconversation.com.au and Nomanis at www.nomanis.com.au

References

Buckingham, J., Nayton, M., Snow, P., Capp. S., Prince, G., & McNamara, A. (2017). *National Year 1 literacy and numeracy check: Expert advisory panel advice to the Minister*. https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/year-1-check-expert-advisory-panel-final-report

Government of South Australia (2019). 2019 Phonics Screening Check. https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-phonics-screening-check-fact-sheet.pdf

Hammond, L. (2017). Why do we need a phonics test for six year olds? The Conversation, 2/2/17. https://theconversation.com/why-do-we-need-a-phonics-test-for-six-year-olds-72080

Hordacre, A., Moretti, C., & Spoehr, J. (2017). *Evaluation of the trial of the UK Phonics Screening Check in South Australian schools*. Flinders University Australian Industrial Transformation Institute. https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/g/files/net691/f/evaluation-uk-phonics-screening-check-sa.pdf

UK Government (2018). Phonics screening check and key stage 1 assessments: England 2018. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/phonics-screening-check-and-key-stage-1-assessments-england-2018

Walker, M., Sainsbury, M. Worth, J., Bamforth, H., & Betts, H. (2015). *Phonics screening check evaluation: Final report*. National Foundation for Educational Research. https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/yopc03/yopc03.pdf

Wheldall, K., Bell, N., Wheldall, R., Madelaine, A. & Reynolds, M. (2019). Performance of Australian children on the English Phonics Screening Check following systematic synthetic phonics instruction in the first two years of schooling. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 24(2), 131-145. https://doi.org/10.1080/19404158.2019.1635500

Synthetic Phonics: What it is and what it is not

Stephen Parker explains the difference between synthetic, analytic, analogy and onset-rime phonics, arguing that synthetic phonics is best.

Background

During the quarter century, from 1975 to 2000, the dominant method for teaching reading in the English-speaking world was whole language. Its main characteristics were:

- Immersion in so-called "real" books. This was in opposition to the artificial *Dick and Jane* readers of the 40s, 50s, and 60s in the US (*Janet and John* in the UK, *John and Betty* in Australia). This immersion was supposed to lead, easily and naturally, to reading, just as earlier in the child's life, immersion in conversation led to speaking.
- Little to no phonics. Phonics instruction, if it did occur, was unsystematic, and was taught only as a last resort.
- Rote-memorization of sight words.
- Word-guessing based on pictures, or context, or the word's first letter.
- Early writing using "invented" spelling. This resulted in spelling by letter names rather than letter sounds (e.g. EZ for "easy"; RM for "arm"; LFN for "elephant").
- Learning by personal "discovery" rather than by direct instruction from a well-trained teacher.

The National Reading Report and Balanced Literacy

In 2000 the US National Reading Panel (NRP) condemned whole language by name, and in its place called for *systematic* phonics. The educational establishment, including professors in Teacher Colleges, the International Literacy Association, and the National Council of Teachers of English, responded with balanced literacy.

Balanced Literacy

There is no universally agreed-upon definition for what constitutes balanced literacy. See, for example, Pamela's Snow's comment on balanced literacy at *https://pamelasnow.blogspot.com/2017/05/balanced-literacy-instructional.html* for further discussion of the many problems this creates. It seems clear to me, however, that *balanced literacy was (and is) an attempt to rescue whole language by "balancing" it with some type of phonics* – presumably *systematic* phonics in light of the critical NRP report. So, what types of phonics can reasonably coexist with whole language? There are only three candidates: analytic phonics, analogy phonics, and onset-rime phonics.

Analytic Phonics

Analytic phonics requires that the child first build up a large cache of sight words. These words can then be analyzed, allowing the child to "discover" the letter/sound relationships in our alphabetic code. Here are two examples. Once BOAT, BOY, and BED are sight words, the child can be led to discover that B symbolizes the sound /b/. Once BOAT, LOAF, and SOAP are memorized, the child can be led to discover that OA symbolizes /O/ (long O). To systematically cover the alphabetic code in this manner takes 5 to 6 years, due to the required sight word memorization and to the "discovery" mode of teaching. See, for example, the popular balanced literacy book, *Words Their Way*, by Donald Bear.

Analogy Phonics

Analogy phonics also requires a large cache of sight words to get started. My favorite example of this type of phonics, because it seems so implausible to me, is taken from a book by balanced literacy author Jennifer Serravallo. In the *Reading Strategies Book* (p 82), she suggests this strategy: Suppose a child had GREEN and SLOW memorized as sight words. Suppose, too, that the child knows (via analytic phonics) that N symbolizes the sound /n/.

Now the child is faced with reading the unknown (for her) word GROWN. So, she "word-solves" by analogy. She takes the GR sound from her sight word GREEN, the OW sound from her sight word SLOW, plus the sound of N, and blends these 3 sounds together: /gr/+/ow/+/n/ = GROWN. Having thus pieced together a pronunciation, she checks if the word makes sense in the context of the sentence.

Whether such a strategy is realistic for beginners, and whether analogy phonics could, even in a dozen years, systematically cover the alphabetic code, I leave it to the reader to judge.

Onset-Rime Phonics

Onset-rime phonics is really a subset of analogy phonics. Here's how it works. Suppose TEACH is a sight word for Johnny. EACH is called the rime, T the onset. Now Johnny runs into the unknown (for him) word BEACH. To identify it he needs to recall TEACH, not by sound (he doesn't know that yet), but by the fact that, visually, both TEACH and BEACH have the same 4 letters (E, A, C, and H) in the same configuration. Now he simply(?) subtracts the T sound from TEACH and, in its place,

substitutes a B sound (buh?) and he's got it: BEACH. The hope is that he will "read" PEACH, BREACH, LEACH, BLEACH, PREACH, and REACH in the same manner.

The National Reading Panel may have condemned whole language, but it literally paved the way for balanced literacy to flourish

Okay, so that's the EACH rime family. But what about the ACK, OOP, and UNK families? You might find yourself wondering, at this point, just how many rime families are out there? Most teachers who use onset-rime don't realize that there are over 300 rime families in English. One sight word, acting as the pronunciation key, must be memorized *for each rime family*. It gets worse. This covers only single-syllable words. Many more rimes exist only in multi-syllable words (e.g. ULT in ADULT, RESULT, and CONSULT; ECT in DEFECT, RESPECT, and SELECT). Rote-memorization of rimes and onsets, including the sounds of all the beginning blends (BL, SP, TR, and so on), quickly tops 400 items.

Phonics and Whole Language

These three types of phonics are not only compatible with whole language, they satisfy the NRP's weak and nebulous definition of *systematic phonics* as "a planned, sequential set of phonic elements taught explicitly." The NRP, in fact, *explicitly endorsed* the above 3 types of phonics:

> "In teaching phonics explicitly and systematically, several different instructional approaches have been used. These include synthetic phonics, analytic phonics, analogy phonics, and onset-rime phonics. Although these explicit and systematic phonics approaches all use a planned, sequential introduction of a set of phonic elements with teaching and practice of those elements, they differ across a number of other features." (page 2-99)

The NRP may have condemned whole language, but it literally paved the way for balanced literacy to flourish. It can hardly be surprising that the NRP has failed to reform reading instruction in any significant way. See the Nation's Report Card, at *https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/*, if you believe that balanced literacy has improved the reading ability of our children in the past two decades.

Balanced literacy is whole language, but now with an added ingredient: some analytic, analogy, and/or onset-rime phonics. It has become the dominant method for teaching reading and spelling throughout the English-speaking world – except in England.

Phonics and Whole Language in England

How did England escape this madness? Simple. There, in 2006, the Rose Report was published. The Rose Report, unlike the reports of both the National Reading Panel (US, 2000) and Australia's National Inquiry (2005), did not simply issue an innocuous call for *systematic* phonics. The Rose Report went a crucial step further. It called explicitly for synthetic phonics.

Synthetic phonics can't be balanced with Whole Language. It stands in utter opposition to both whole language and balanced literacy. It is not a strategy for "word-solving" (as are analogy phonics and onset-rime phonics). It is a logical and powerful method for teaching reading and spelling, and it contradicts balanced literacy in every way. It sets up a stark choice for anyone wishing to teach a child to read through balanced literacy or synthetic phonics.

So What is Synthetic Phonics?

With the above as background, I would now like to specify, as precisely as possible, what synthetic phonics is, and what it is not.

The English alphabet is a set of 26 arbitrary characters, each of which symbolizes one (or more) basic speech sounds. The alphabetic code is the full set of letter/sound correspondences that determine how written English is spoken and how spoken English is written. To transform sound into print is to encode; to transform print back into sound is to decode.

Out of the 200+ letter/sound correspondences in the code, roughly 105 to 135 need to be explicitly taught in order for the child to become an independent reader. If you are curious as to which letter/sound correspondences I think are necessary, look in appendices P and Q in any of my free books. You can also take a look at my blog at *https://www.parkerphonics.com/post/the-alphabetic-code-made-easy*.

Knowledge of letter names should be in place in order to start a synthetic phonics program. However it is not necessary for all 52 upper-case and lower-case letters to be nameable by the child before beginning. Students can be taught the names of just 4 to 8 letters (a mix of consonants and vowels) in order to get started, and then be taught additional letter names as the program progresses. This enables children to get to genuine reading *as soon as possible* – an important motivational consideration.

In what follows, items 2, 3, 4, and 5 are paraphrases of the four items in the *Rose Report* (p.20) that are referred to as "high quality phonic work". Item 8 is also strongly emphasized in Appendix 1 of the Rose Report.

The characteristics of a synthetic phonics program are as follows:

1. Synthetic phonics is a bottom-up approach to reading and spelling. "Bottom-up" because instruction starts, not with whole words, but with the most basic sound unit there is: the phoneme. The word SHOP, for instance, has 3 sounds or phonemes: /sh/, /o/, and /p/, represented by the letters SH, O, and P respectively. To use synthetic phonics is to teach phonemic awareness, with letters, throughout the entire program. This is the type of phonemic awareness training that the NRP called "most effective."
2. From Day 1, the major grapheme/phoneme (letter/sound) correspondences of the alphabetic code are taught in an explicit and systematic manner, using a clearly-defined sequence, with each new topic building on what has already been learned.
3. As soon as "some" letter/sound correspondences are mastered (say 4 to 8), children can start reading words, that is, they blend (sound-out, synthesize) phonemes, left to right, all through a written word in order to pronounce it. This is the "primitive" form of decoding, not to be confused with the expert, at-a-glance, automatic decoding that begins to develop, slowly at first, then more rapidly, as a synthetic program progresses.
4. Children are taught to listen carefully, and to segment a spoken word into its constituent phonemes in order to spell it. Initially, best practice is to do this only with words the children

have just sounded-out by decoding, thereby making the segmenting and spelling task easier for them.

5 Children are explicitly shown how blending and segmenting are reversible processes.

6 Children are asked to read for themselves only words and sentences for which they already have the skills to succeed. Such text is called decodable for them.

7 A synthetic phonics program is easily completed within two years for the vast majority of students, meaning that, by the end of two years, children are able, within reason, to read independently. Leveled books are neither necessary nor helpful.

8 Reading comprehension (RC) during these two years is understood strictly in terms of the Simple View of Reading. Roughly half of every Language Arts period is spent with the teacher reading children's literature to the class and then conducting a group discussion about that reading. In this manner, both decoding skills (D) and language comprehension skills (LC) improve daily. The Simple View makes the claim: RC = D x LC. Further discussion of the Simple View can be found in a different blog on my web site at *https://www.parkerphonics.com/post/the-simple-view-of-reading-still-conclusive-after-33-years*.

9 Perhaps the main characteristic of a synthetic phonics program is that it presents reading to the child as a logical skill right from the start. Children, like adults, need to understand what they are being asked to do, especially if the task requires significant daily effort extending over a period of many months. Without such an understanding, many children will give up.

It s also important to note that a synthetic phonics program does not:

1 have children rote-memorize words (typically called "sight words") without regard to the sound value of all the word's letters or letter groups. Exceptions to this include about 5 to 10 high-frequency words whose spellings are so bizarre, when compared to their actual pronunciations, that rote-memorization may be necessary, for example one, two, though, eye, and once).

2 use top-down teaching methods that start with whole words (sight words) rather than with phonemes and letters. Any program that uses analytic phonics, analogy phonics, or onset-rime phonics must, by its very nature, be top-down.

3 expect that children will discover the letter/sound correspondences of the alphabetic code. There is neither time nor reason to have students "construct their own knowledge" when it comes to learning the skill of reading. All other academic skills depend on the ability to read. For a critique of "constructivism" as it is misapplied to the teaching of reading, see the Australian National Inquiry report *Teaching Reading*, especially pages 29 to 30.

4 expect, encourage, or allow children to guess the identity of an unknown word based on pictures, context, or the word's first letter. Although context may be used to decide how to pronounce homographs like 'wind' and 'bow'.

5 use "predictable" text, thereby giving everyone involved the illusion that the child is reading. The reality is that the child is merely reciting memorized sight words, and guessing, leading to what has often been called the 'fourth grade slump', when these strategies are no longer successful.

6 ask children to write, using words that they have not yet been taught to spell, thereby assuring "invented" spelling and letter-name spelling. These repeated spelling errors prove difficult for children to correct later on. Phonetic spelling is the goal. Phonetically plausible mistakes (e.g. 'bote' instead of 'boat') show significant skill. A child making this mistake should be congratulated, then corrected. The child should also be told that, had the word been 'note', the o-t-e spelling would have been correct, and 'noat' would have been wrong.

7 use leveled books. Independent readers will, with a little help, find books appropriate to their skill level. No child need be stigmatized or embarrassed by being at level B when all his or her friends are at levels D and E.

8 need teachers who can function only as a 'guide on the side', or worse, a 'peer at the rear'. The teacher in a synthetic phonics program must be a 'sage on the stage'. That's why he or she is there, being paid a salary. Synthetic phonics teachers need to be comfortable with far more whole-class, direct instruction than is currently the norm in most of today's reading classes where 'mini-lessons' of 5 to 10 minutes each often prevail. They also need to have a reasonable understanding of the science behind reading instruction. See for example Pamela Snow's blog at *https://pamelasnow.blogspot.com/2016/04/reading-is-verb-literacy-is-not.html* for a useful discussion on this.

Note that the above list of what a synthetic phonics program does not do could serve equally well as a list of what a balanced literacy program does do in the initial two years.

Which teacher would you choose?

Imagine for a moment that you, as an adult, were just now beginning the task of learning to read and spell. Which of these two teachers would you prefer?

Synthetic phonics can't be balanced with Whole Language. It stands in utter opposition to both whole language and balanced literacy.

Teacher #1, right at the outset, begins with direct teaching of the alphabetic code. In the first week, for instance, you learn that the letter M symbolizes the nasal sound "mmm," N symbolizes "nnn," and A symbolizes "ahh" (the first sound in APPLE). Once you've mastered these three letter/sound relationships, this teacher places the three letters together on a blackboard, M A N, and helps you to blend the three sounds these letters symbolize into the spoken word MAN.

The teacher does the same with the words AN and AM and has you use these simple words in spoken sentences, helping you if necessary: "I want AN egg." "I AM sleepy." The teacher may even place N A M on the board and help you to blend that as well. The two of you agree that NAM is not a real word, but then the teacher places the words e**nam**el and dy**nam**ic on the board to show you how NAM will certainly appear later on, in more complex words. You discuss the meanings of these two

words even though you can't (yet) fully read them.

Over time, the teacher does the above with many other letters, sounds, and simple words. Often the teacher reverses the process and asks you to spell a spoken word that you have just recently created by blending. Pretty quickly, you become keenly aware of phonemes in speech and you begin to understand the logic of print. It is nothing more than encoded sound! Because you understand what is going on, your brain starts making connections between the spelling of MAN (a new thing) and the sound and meaning of MAN that has been stored in your brain since you began speaking. You become increasingly *enthusiastic* about your reading lessons, and you find yourself wanting to learn more about this amazing alphabetic code.

Teacher #2 has a very different approach. He or she places MAN on a "word wall" so you can see it throughout the day. This teacher also has you read the word in a predictable "little book," pointing as you go ("The MAN is sleeping… The MAN is eating… The MAN is running…). The hope is that, by constantly seeing the words THE, MAN, and IS, you will eventually memorize them as "sight words." You are expected to guess the meaning of the words "sleeping," "eating," and "running" by looking at the pictures that are ubiquitous in these "little books."

This teacher makes no attempt to explain *why* the letters M, A, and N, in this particular order, represent the spoken word MAN. Though difficult to do, precisely because no explanation has been offered, you study the word carefully, and you memorize it as a symbolic representation of the spoken word MAN, similar to the way that you might memorize a password, or that the symbol $ means DOLLAR.

So far so good. But day after day, Teacher #2 presents more sight words for you to rote-memorize. There seems to be no end to them! Only later, perhaps much later, will this teacher have you slowly "discover" for yourself (using analytic phonics) the letter/sound relationships of the code that *explain* the spellings.

A final thought

I believe that most adults (including most balanced literacy teachers!) would choose Teacher #1 for themselves, precisely because they'd want someone who would make the skill of reading understandable *from the beginning*, that is to say, open to the use of reasoning, and to "figuring it out." If forced to study with Teacher #2, most articulate adults would insist upon explanations: *Why* do the letters M, A, and N represent the spoken word MAN rather than, say, DOG, TURNIP, or BATTLESHIP? How can guessing, based on pictures, result in skilled reading? Why are CAT, CITY, and CHAIR listed under C on an alphabetic "word wall" when each word starts with a different sound?

Children, of course, don't have the above choice, and most find themselves facing Teacher #2 in a balanced literacy classroom. These children lack the confidence and the maturity to justifiably insist that their teacher offer some explanations. Children, eager to please, *simply do the best they can*. Some will become skilled readers in spite of the system – perhaps with help from home or from outside tutoring. Others, intent on getting along, will plug away, year after year, but they will never become proficient readers, or read for pleasure. And still others, including some of our brightest kids, will get so frustrated with the sight words, the guessing, and the lack of logic that they will simply give up. They will refuse to pay attention. Their self-esteem will plummet. They will begin to act out. They will start hating school. And in no time at all, they will find themselves categorized as "learning disabled", caught in a system that has utterly failed them.

There is a lot of wasted human potential and needless suffering going on in our schools. Why don't we teach our children to read as we ourselves would want to be taught?

Stephen Parker is a long-time teacher of Mathematics, Computer Science and Reading. He lives in Boston with his wife and their three children – all currently in college. His free books and his blog on reading instruction are available at his web site: www.ParkerPhonics.com. Stephen can also be followed on Twitter where his username is @ParkerPhonics.

The Phonemic Awareness versus Phonics Debate: Avoiding the Friendly Fire

Many competent readers make errors on complex phonemic awareness tests but are still able to recognise real words and read non-words effortlessly. Does this mean that accurate advanced phonemic awareness isn't necessary for readers to develop their orthographic mapping skills? **Ros Neilson** takes a close look at current controversies surrounding the development of orthographic mapping skills, exploring the disagreements between the experts and making some constructive suggestions for noncontroversial ways that teachers can address phonemic awareness as they support early reading development.

Introduction

Within the group of reading experts who support the evidence that the code-breaking aspects of reading should be taught explicitly and systematically, a surprising amount of internal skirmishing takes place. One of the more recent active battlegrounds has involved particularly vigorous debate on the Developmental Disorders of Language and Literacy (DDOLL) Network, which is an online discussion group that can be joined at *http://www.cogsci.mq.edu.au/ddoll/index.html* . This battle has involved questioning the relevance of phonemic awareness training when systematic phonics teaching is in place.

As a clinician/researcher who has spent many years working on assessment and intervention for phonemic and phonological awareness (Neilson 2003, 2009, 2014a, 2014b, 2016), I have found this debate very stimulating, even though it remains largely unresolved. The skirmish has given me the chance to re-think my understanding of the concepts of phonological and phonemic awareness and the role they play for students who are learning to crack the alphabetic code. In this discussion paper I would like to explore the issues and offer a few very brief suggestions for how clinicians and teachers might, in the midst of all the crossfire, implement strategies to support learners as they learn to recognise and spell words.

> … This battle has involved questioning the relevance of phonemic awareness training when systematic phonics teaching is in place.

Before I start this discussion paper, however, I would like to invite readers to step into the role of research participants. Please take a moment to carry out four brief phonemic tasks, and think about your responses as you do so. In an authentic phonemic awareness test situation, of course, all stimuli would be presented orally, without the written words in view. Ideally, therefore, if you participate in this exercise you should also discuss the tasks with a colleague or family member who doesn't have the written words in front of them - a nine-year old child who is a good reader would be a quite suitable co-participant.

These are the phonemic awareness tasks:

1. Say *stale*. Now say it again but don't say /t/. (From *Test of Auditory Analysis Skills*, Rosner, 1979)
2. Say *truth*, but don't say /r/. (From *PAST*, Kilpatrick 2019 – see *https://www.thepasttest.com* for a free download of the test)
3. Say *bind* without the /n/ sound. (From a research study by Stuart, 1990)
4. Say *pink* but don't say /k/. (From *Phoneme Deletion Test*, Bruce, 1964)

I will return to a discussion of the tasks below.

Background Terminology

I'll start with a fairly standard definition of three relevant terms.

- *Phonological awareness* is usually defined as an auditory skill that involves paying attention to sounds in the speech stream. Phonological awareness is generally taken to be a metalinguistic affair, involving conscious consideration of the speech stream rather than automatic processing of speech for the purpose of understanding language. In practice, phonological awareness is defined as the ability to isolate, identify and manipulate sounds in spoken words. Phonological awareness is used as an umbrella term, applying to sound segments

of varying sizes, including syllables, onsets and rimes, and phonemes.

- *Phonemic awareness* is traditionally defined as a sub-category of phonological awareness, applying only to awareness of phoneme-sized segments.
- *Orthographic mapping* is a concept that has recently started to crop up frequently in this present debate. The term refers to the process that underlies the acquisition of the ability to recognise words fluently and automatically, without sounding out.

The Battleground: Phonics versus Phonemic Awareness

For several decades phonological awareness has held a very respectable status, alongside phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension, as one of the National Reading Panel's (2000) five essential components of literacy. The role of phonological awareness in literacy development has been subject to only occasional challenges - see for example, Castles & Coltheart (2004), where an argument was made for awareness of phonemes being a result of, rather than a causal factor in, learning to read and write. Despite this kind of challenge, the acceptance of the importance of phonological awareness has not officially changed over the years, as evidenced by the current Australian Curriculum (ACARA 2020), a recent position statement from the International Literacy Association (2020), etc. Phonological awareness has, moreover, recently been given a strong additional endorsement by Dr David Kilpatrick (see Kilpatrick 2015, 2016) in a 2019 speaking tour for Learning Difficulties Australia. Kilpatrick's argument, and the subsequent discussion of his position, is what the skirmishing on the DDOLL Network is about.

Kilpatrick (2015) has introduced a new term into the arena: *advanced phonemic awareness*. Kilpatrick defines advanced phonemic awareness as the ability to carry out complex phoneme manipulation tasks in the auditory modality with fluency and automaticity. He argues that best practice for teaching word reading involves giving students practice in auditory phoneme manipulation in addition to providing a systematic synthetic phonics program. His position is that proficiency in advanced phonemic awareness as a purely auditory skill is an essential component of reading development because it enables efficient orthographic mapping to occur as students gain reading experience.

Orthographic mapping... refers to the process that underlies the acquisition of the ability to recognise words fluently and automatically, without sounding out.

Kilpatrick's position has in effect brought phonemic awareness quite squarely into the firing line from a large group of systematic synthetic phonics proponents – for example, Parker (2019). The combatants on this side of the skirmish argue that there is no point in addressing phonemic awareness as a purely auditory skill. Their position is that phonemic awareness is relevant to reading instruction only to the extent that it is naturally involved in the routine segmentation and blending practice already provided by systematic synthetic phonics teaching, with alphabet letters very much in place. Orthographic mapping skills are seen as the natural outcome of good phonics teaching, combined with practice and reading experience. Indeed, Parker (2019) dismisses many aspects of phonemic awareness as merely 'something of an obsession in top-down Balanced Literacy' (p. 82); other phonics specialists on the DDOLL Network have referred to Kilpatrick's recommendation to focus on advanced phonemic awareness as mere 'auditory acrobatics'.

For convenience, I will be referring to the two sides of the debate as the 'Kilpatrick' side and the 'Phonics-Only' side. For the sake of clarity, I will be characterising the two positions in their most extreme 'purist' terms, and I apologise in advance to those proponents who feel they have been mis-represented.

Within the skirmish there is full consensus that learning to read words efficiently involves orthographic mapping. The disagreement is only about the issue of whether or not advanced phonemic awareness is a necessary prerequisite for efficient orthographic mapping. The Phonics-Only side see mature orthographic mapping as a direct consequence of reading practice, once phonics has been mastered; the Kilpatrick side sees orthographic mapping as a product of three factors: phonics knowledge, practice, and advanced phonemic awareness.

Is this skirmishing merely friendly fire between reading experts whose agreements are far greater than their disagreements, or is there an issue of theoretical and practical importance to be teased out here?

Debriefing: The Phonemic Awareness Tasks

At this stage I will offer my own comments on the four phonemic awareness tasks I invited readers to participate in at the beginning of this article.

I suspect it will be generally agreed by participants that Item 1, taken from Rosner's *Test of Auditory Analysis Skills* (saying *stale* without the /t/) is the most straightforward of the four tasks. Participants' responses to this item will probably have been faster than their responses to the other items. The answer is simply the word *sale*. It is unlikely that anyone was thinking of the word *sail* as they gave their answers, although this would also have been technically correct (readers could check on whether their co-participants had *sale* or *sail* in mind by asking them to define the word). Importantly, there is a straightforward relationship between the spelling patterns in the stimulus word and the possible response word, and this means that a correct answer could have been arrived at by thinking about the phonemes, or by visualising the letters, or by doing both. The item can be described as 'orthographically transparent.'

- For the record, most of the phoneme-level items in the SPAT-R (Neilson, 2003) and FELA (Neilson, 2016) fall into the orthographically transparent category.

Items 2, 3 and 4 are all more problematic, because for all of them the spelling of the word is not conducive to solving the phonemic awareness task.

Item 2, where /r/ is deleted from *truth*, is taken from Kilpatrick's *PAST* assessment tool. Many participants may do a slight double take as they think about the item, but will eventually come up with the word *tooth* as the correct answer; their hesitation may have involved consideration of the spelling changes

involved, and musing about the possible pronunciation of the non-word *tuth*.

- It is important to note that all the phoneme level items in all versions of the *PAST* follow this pattern; they all fall into a category that Kilpatrick terms 'orthographically confusing'. I will come back to this feature of the *PAST* test below.

Item 3, saying *bind* without the /n/, is taken from a research study published by Stuart (1990). It is an interesting item. Is the answer *bid* or *bide*? If you think about the letters, using an orthographic strategy, you will answer *bid*, but if you think about the sounds, using a phonological strategy, you will answer *bide*. As part of a follow-up study, Stuart (1990) administered a set of phoneme deletion items to a group of nine-year old children who varied in reading/spelling ability. In one of her experimental conditions all the possible answers were real words, but for some of the items an orthographic strategy would yield a different answer from a phonological strategy – as in *bind* without the /n/. This experimental manipulation provided a direct window into which strategy the child was using. Stuart (1990) reported that more competent young reader/spellers had a very strong tendency to produce answers revealing an orthographic strategy. Stuart (1990) documented the fact that many of the strong readers could switch strategies when they were encouraged to attend only to the sounds and not visualise the letters – but they still volunteered the comment that they found it easier to do it 'the spelling way'. Those weaker readers who could attempt the task had a strong preference for using a phonological strategy. They tended to take longer to produce their responses, often orally segmenting and blending the phonemes rather laboriously as they did so. Overall, the tendency not to visualise the spellings of words was a clear hallmark of weaker readers and spellers. One of Stuart's comments in the Discussion section of the published article is very thought-provoking: "Poor reader/spellers continued to develop phonological skills as they learnt to read … but this seemed to happen in isolation from the reading process and without reciprocal influence from experience of orthography" (p.314).

- There is one item in each of the two forms of the *SPAT-R* (Neilson 2003) that falls into the same category as Stuart's (1990) experimental list: *cold* without the /l/ (*SPAT-R* Form A) and *gold* without the /l/ (*SPAT-R* Form B). These items yield either *cod* or *code*, and *god* or *goad*, depending on whether an orthographic or a phonological strategy was used. (I do concede that the pronunciation of the vowel and the /l/ in *cold* and *gold* varies in some Australian accents, which makes these particular examples a little difficult to interpret.) In the *SPAT-R* scoring system, item analysis data suggested that it was necessary to accept both the orthographic response and the phonological response as correct, because although the phonological response was technically more 'correct' in phonetic terms, the orthographic response had a much higher positive correlation with the Total Score. My own clinical experience in the years following the publication of the *SPAT-R* has added further support to Stuart's finding: there is a consistent strong orthographic strategy preference in more competent readers (Neilson, 2009) and a phonological strategy preference in weaker readers, with the very weakest readers unable to attempt the item at all.

> Put simply, literate people tend to rely on their knowledge of word spellings when they are asked to think about sounds in words.

I confess that I have included Bruce's (1964) item (saying *pink* without the /k/) as a nostalgia piece. For those readers who have not had explicit phonetics instruction, the orthographic problem in this item is the most difficult to understand. When the /k/ is deleted from *pink*, the phonemes remaining are pronounced *ping*, because a nasal phoneme before the letter K is spelled with the letter N, but is pronounced as /ng/. The graphemes work against the most common assumptions of letter-sound correspondences. Bruce (1964) himself actually supplied the correct answer as *pin*, thereby demonstrating an orthographic strategy for solving the phonemic awareness task. Many early phonemic awareness tests from the 1970s, as well as many of the exercises one still tends to see in school lesson plans, include examples of the same kind of confusion between phonemes and graphemes – for example, stating that if you take the /n/ out of *monkey* you will get the word *money*, and advising students they should listen more carefully and/or speak more clearly if they can't hear the long *O* in crocodile.

Phonemic awareness tasks and the dominance of orthographic knowledge

My reason for inviting readers to participate in the phonemic awareness tasks at the beginning of this discussion is to bring to the foreground a phenomenon that I think has been under-explored in discussions about the role of phonemic awareness in phonics teaching, and that is directly relevant to the debate about whether phonemic awareness practice should be carried out without letters. It represents one of the most useful of the many insights into literacy provided by Linnea Ehri (see Ehri & Wilce, 1980) and replicated repeatedly by other researchers (e.g. Stuart, 1990; Tunmer & Nesdale 1982, 1985). Put simply, literate people tend to rely on their knowledge of word spellings when they are asked to think about sounds in words. If people can visualise the spelling of a stimulus item, they automatically do so - even if the task explicitly relates to phonemes. To expect people not to visualise letters when they are thinking about sounds is a bit like expecting them not to be affected by what is commonly known as the Stroop Effect (that is, the difficulty you experience when you are asked, for example, to name the colour of the ink when the word RED is printed in blue.) It is very difficult, once you have learned to read and spell, to inhibit your orthographic knowledge.

> It is very difficult, once you have learned to read and spell, to inhibit your orthographic knowledge.

The effect of orthographic knowledge on phonological awareness tests has been shown in tasks involving syllables and rime units as well as in tasks that involve phoneme manipulations – it takes a fraction longer, for example, to decide whether *chair* and *bear* rhyme than to decide

whether *chair* and *hair* rhyme. As was shown by the phonemic awareness tasks at the beginning of this discussion, reliance on visual strategies is not highlighted in orthographically transparent phonemic awareness tasks, where there is no conflict between the letters and the phonological segments that are to be manipulated. But when the relevant grapheme-phoneme relationships aren't immediately helpful in solving the task, the normal pervasiveness of orthographic strategies in competent readers is quite clear.

I have often wondered whether the dominating effect of mental orthographic images may be a factor underlying the frequently reported research finding that many teachers have poor phonemic awareness...

Ehri offers a common-sense account of why awareness of orthography tends to over-ride phonology, at least in more complex tests of phoneme manipulation: it's easier to do the tasks that way. She points out that phonemes are abstract, transient and difficult to hold in auditory memory, while letters have over-learned names and are more concrete than phonemes. Sequences of letters, even if they are only vaguely visualised, have a spatial quality that supports mental rehearsal and manipulation. Ehri argues, furthermore, that orthographic knowledge becomes amalgamated with other aspects of word knowledge – meaning, sound, and pronunciation – in our mental lexicon, and all these aspects of lexical representations are evoked simultaneously when a word is seen or heard (Ehri 1989; Ehri 1995; Ehri 2000; Ehri 2005; Ehri 2014; Ehri & McCormick, 1998; Ehri & Snowling 2014; Ehri & Wilce 1980).

I have often wondered whether the dominating effect of mental orthographic images may be a factor underlying the frequently reported research finding that many teachers have poor phonemic awareness. If teachers are asked to count the phonemes in *box* or identify the second phoneme in *queen*, they tend to give answers that reveal confusion between spelling and sounds (e.g. Arrow et al. 2015; Fielding-Barnsley & Purdie, 2005; Moats, 2000; Piasta et al, 2009). This finding obviously does not augur well for methodical systematic phonics teaching. I have never been convinced, however, that the finding necessarily demonstrates generally weak phonemic awareness – it might simply reflect naivete regarding the strategies expected on phonemic awareness tasks (Washburn et al., 2011). Teachers might indeed have the ability to attend to phonemes – and be less confused when they are teaching phonics – if they were systematically directed away from attending to their established mental orthographic images of the words and re-directed towards attending to their own phonological representations as they thought about sounds.

Kilpatrick's *PAST*: Interpretation and relevance to classroom practice

At this stage I will return to the Kilpatrick versus Phonics-Only skirmish, and I will try to substantiate my suggestion that it is possible – indeed desirable – to avoid the friendly fire.

I find it useful to begin my argument with reference to Kilpatrick's *PAST* assessment tool, which takes a rather challenging slant on the issue of the use of orthographic strategies on phonemic awareness tasks.

Kilpatrick (2015) characterises attending to orthography on phonemic awareness tasks as 'cheating' (p. 158), and he cautions that use of a visual strategy will actually confound phonemic awareness tests. Kilpatrick's stated assumption is that students may tend to visualise spellings *because they do not have adequate phonemic awareness*. He argues that there are more steps involved in visualising letters to carry out the tasks than there are in doing the tasks by thinking just about the phonemes, and therefore orthographic responding will tend to be slower than phonological responding.

At first glance, this position is in rather striking contrast with Ehri's observations about orthographic strategies being characteristic of mature readers, and with Stuart's (1990) observations that the orthographic responding shown by her strong reader/spellers tended to be instantaneous, with phonological strategies being more laborious. Kilpatrick's position is probably also in contrast with what readers would have experienced as they carried out the tasks I set at the beginning of this article: it is easy to do phonemic awareness tasks when orthography is helpful, and it only becomes difficult to do the tasks when you have to inhibit the orthographic knowledge that is interfering. Proponents on the Phonics-Only side might well argue that interference of orthography on phonemic awareness tasks may actually be an encouraging sign that orthographical knowledge is well established, rather than an indication of poor phonemic awareness.

Given Kilpatrick's initial premise that orthography can confound phonemic awareness testing, however, he has gone to impressive lengths to exclude the use of orthographic strategies from the *PAST*. All the phoneme-level items on the test are orthographically inconsistent, such as the *truth/tooth* example mentioned above, or the deletion of /d/ from *word* to produce *were*. (I can't resist commenting that it must have taken very dedicated manpower to come up with all the orthographically inconsistent stimulus and response words used in all the versions of the *PAST* – much credit is due to the research assistants involved.) So, when responding to test items on the *PAST*, those students who might naturally tend to visualise the spelling of words would be forced, if possible, into using a phonological strategy. Feedback on errors is built into the test, which means that strategy switching, as Stuart (1990) documented, is quite likely to happen with the stronger students.

... it is easy to do phonemic awareness tasks when orthography is helpful, and it only becomes difficult to do the tasks when you have to inhibit your orthographic knowledge that is interfering...

Another critical feature of the *PAST* is that the scoring includes a timing factor: any 'instantaneous' response (defined as having a latency of less than two seconds) is awarded two points, while slower correct responses are given only one point. Kilpatrick's rationale for this is that "there is reason to believe that the faster responses require greater phonemic awareness proficiency" (Kilpatrick & McGuinness, 2015, cited in

Kilpatrick, 2015, p. 159.)

I am not questioning Kilpatrick's claim that, as a screening test, the *PAST* would be efficient and reliable in sorting out stronger from weaker readers. I am also not questioning one aspect of its validity - that is, children who can carry out the manipulation tasks quickly, scoring close to ceiling on the test, indeed do have strong phonemic awareness. I am, however, concerned about the test's implications when students do not do well, and about the teaching/support recommendations that might follow.

It is useful to consider two ways that low scores can be achieved on the *PAST*: inaccurate responses and slow responses. With slow responses, students may actually get most of the items correct but achieve only approximately half marks on the Total Score because they take longer than two seconds to produce the answers, scoring one point instead of two for each item. I would imagine that these error patterns actually overlap to a fair degree in individual children, but it may be useful to discuss the two kinds of low scores, and consider their teaching implications, separately.

a Low scoring on the *PAST*: Inaccurate responses or failure to respond.

If students simply cannot carry out the phoneme manipulation tasks accurately, there may be indirect reasons for the problem. Students may, for example, be losing attention or failing to understand the instructions, and this could suggest that further assessment of their attention skills and/or listening comprehension is indicated. These indirect factors are common to all assessment tasks that involve verbal instructions. There may also, of course, be a more direct reason for students giving incorrect responses or failing to respond on the *PAST*: their phonemic awareness may not yet support the segmentation and identification of all the phonemes in the stimulus words.

This 'diagnosis' of weak phonemic awareness in students who make accuracy errors on the *PAST* is probably most usefully confirmed in additional tasks that require children to attempt to spell nonwords. Nonwords rather than real words have to be used because correctly spelled real words may reflect students' rote-learned spelling skills rather than their awareness of underlying grapheme-phoneme correspondences. Nonword spelling is a task that can be administered as soon as students have a reasonable grasp of alphabet letters. Note that there is no need, in this case, to measure their speed of responding. Careful analysis of their successes and errors will clearly highlight which of the phonemes in the spoken nonwords they identify clearly enough to make an effort to represent with letters, and which phonemes are omitted or misidentified (see Neilson, 2003, 2014a, 2016).

What teaching recommendations would follow from this diagnosis of poor phonemic awareness? Purists on the Kilpatrick side of the skirmish would probably reiterate that phonemic awareness is something that can be done with the eyes closed, and support for these students' phonemic awareness should therefore be provided with no reference to alphabet letters. Purists on the Phonics-Only side would assume that phonemic awareness would develop naturally with more phonics teaching and practice – an assumption that is never tested if phonemic awareness is never assessed within the phonics classroom. I would argue that there are possible flaws in the logic on both sides of the skirmish, related to the fact that neither side explicitly considers integrating visual and phonological information.

Phonemic awareness has to be a very explicit part of a systematic phonics program if this kind of supportive teaching strategy is to be implemented, and this very probably requires extra teacher training

The problem with the Kilpatrick side is that if lack of detailed awareness of phonemes in the speech stream is indeed a problem, it is likely that attention to letters in words will be a useful strategy in supporting the clarification of the speech stream (cf. Boyer & Ehri, 2011; Stuart, 1990). The extra cue afforded by the presence of letters in words is very helpful indeed in exploring subtle or ambiguous aspects of phonemes – for example, in realising that the /t/ phoneme changes in quality when it is followed by /r/, as in the word *train*, or in finding and identifying the subtle pause and articulatory movement that creates the /k/ phoneme in the word *act*.

The problem with the Phonics-Only position, I suggest, is that subtle phonological cues will not necessarily be accessible to those students whose phonological systems are not robust, and who end up needing extra support. Successful systematic phonics teachers must have the skills to help students to attend carefully to phonology, giving due attention to articulatory as well as auditory cues. Phonemic awareness has to be a very explicit part of a systematic phonics program if this kind of supportive teaching strategy is to be implemented, and this very probably requires extra teacher training.

b Low Scoring on the *PAST*: Slow Responding.

The second kind of poor scorers on the *PAST* are students who respond accurately but slowly. They do indeed have the ability to segment, identify and manipulate all the phonemes in the words they are trying to manipulate. Their auditory manipulation skills, however, are not yet 'automatic' – with automaticity measured in terms of speed of execution. Kilpatrick rightly points out that lack of automaticity may be an unrecognised problem if speed of responding on phonemic awareness tasks is not assessed.

The diagnostic implications of this pattern of poor scoring on the *PAST*, seen from proponents on both sides of the skirmish, are similar to the recommendations for inaccurate responders. That is, purists on the Kilpatrick side of the debate would, I think, offer the recommendation that the students engage in more phoneme manipulation practice, avoiding the use of orthographic strategies, in order to develop advanced phonemic awareness. The Phonics-Only side of the debate, on the other hand, would probably simply recommend more phonics practice. Once again, I would argue that there may be gaps in the logic on both sides – and once again, the problem is that neither side explicitly considers integrating orthographic and phonological information.

As was the case with inaccurate responding on the *PAST*, of course, there may be factors involved in slow responding on the *PAST* that that are not directly related to phonemic awareness. I suggest that difficulties with Rapid Automatic Naming and Working Memory are the most likely candidates here – but in this discussion I won't even start to open the can of worms related to programs that aim to address underlying skills rather than working directly on literacy skills.

At the chalkface, however, the slow responders raise another issue that has

in effect been removed from the picture by Kilpatrick's decision to exclude orthographic strategies from the *PAST*. My concern, basically, is that there may be another important difference between the fast responders and slow responders on the *PAST* – a difference that goes beyond their speed of carrying out advanced phonemic awareness tasks. My hypothesis is that students who are slow accurate responders on the auditory phonemic awareness tasks might also be relatively less competent than fast responders at generating mental orthographic images of words and sub-lexical units – a skill that seems to be a hallmark of competence with the alphabetic code (Stuart, 1990). The slow responders are possibly students who wouldn't have been able to (in Kilpatrick's terms) 'cheat' by using orthographic strategies, even if the test had allowed them to.

If weak, inaccurate or fuzzy mental orthographic images is an issue, this might be explored further in other forms of assessment. The slow responders might possibly also be very poor spellers, with spelling errors that are largely phonetically accurate. They may be students who try to learn spelling lists by rote or by using laborious mnemonics, and who end up grasping at fragmentary bits of orthographic knowledge (e.g. "I know there is an N in *environment* somewhere, but I can't remember where to put it.") They may be students who keep confusing similar-looking words such as *for* and *from*, *though* and *thought*, *on* and *no*, etc. It seems very likely that their learning to read has not involved competent orthographic mapping.

I am suggesting that no matter how well these students learned to manipulate phonemes quickly in the auditory modality, they still might not bring this skill to the task of orthographic mapping. Their phonemic awareness might continue to be dissociated from their spelling knowledge.

Avoiding the crossfire: An explicit strategy for integrating phonological and orthographic learning

I would like at this stage to propose a white flag in the form of a clinical teaching tool I have been using for many years – a tool that has not been researched in any control trials, but which I have found to be useful in mainstream early literacy classrooms as well as in Tier 2 and 3 remedial clinics. The tool is a simple learning activity designed to show students how to integrate visual and auditory information – a skill that I have argued is needed to support students who encounter a range of barriers to successful orthographic mapping.

I refer to the activity as *'tracking words'*. I like to develop a shared understanding of the concept from the very earliest point of literacy teaching. The activity is reinforced by a visual image, shown in Figure 1, which I print out and distribute freely to students, families and teachers. There are four components involved in tracking words: eyes, pointing finger, mouth and ears.

The Tracking Words activity involves starting with a written word or non-word whose pronunciation is known, clearly displayed in view. The student is invited to look at the written word, run a finger or pen under the letters in the word, say it slowly (not segmenting the phonemes), and listen to the phonemes in each syllable as the phonemes are pronounced. The student's task is to make sure that he or she is pointing under the relevant letter/s as the phoneme occurs in the syllable. The teacher's task is to check that the student is relating the graphemes and the phonemes, mapping them accurately in both time and space.

… the integration of phonological and orthographic information is the very essence of the concept of orthographic mapping …

I start with single syllable words. Words with known regular grapheme-phoneme correspondences are of course ideal at first, but I encourage the use of tracking for all words, even the irregular words on sight word and spelling lists. When grapheme-phoneme surprises occur – such as the letters *AI* in the middle of the word *said* – these are to be noted and discussed.

Once the student is competent at tracking phonemes in monosyllabic words, the tracking activity also sets up the opportunity for chunking as the student runs a finger under polysyllabic words, pausing between syllables. This allows teacher and student to comment on spelling features such as schwa vowels, and to notice and discuss morphemes. At this point the focus on one-to-one grapheme-phoneme relationships can be backgrounded, as students attend to how whole syllables are pronounced and spelled, and notice context-dependent spelling patterns as they say the words. Once again, one of the teacher's tasks is to monitor the accuracy with which the student is mapping the word.

Readers of this discussion paper are free to experiment with my Tracking Words image and related activities for themselves. I would be happy to be

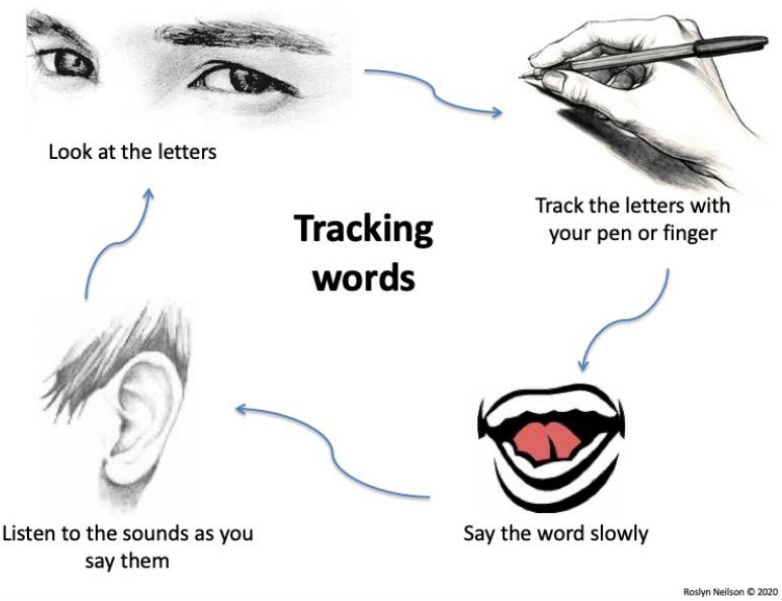


Figure 1: Tracking words

contacted if anyone wants clarification of my clinical suggestions (see www.roslynneilson.com.au).

Conclusion

Amongst all the reading experts in this skirmish, the concept of explicit direct instruction is held in high regard. I have tried to argue that the integration of phonological and orthographic information is the very essence of the concept of orthographic mapping, and I have also suggested that there may be gaps in some of the conventional recommendations on both sides of the skirmish with respect to how to teach this integration explicitly. If both sides agreed that it might be useful to continue to research ways to support mainstream classroom students and students with reading difficulties to bring together their phonological and orthographic skills, this goal might end up being a useful component of the terms of a ceasefire.

Dr Ros Neilson is a Speech-Language Pathologist working in private practice as a consultant and researcher. She specialises in early literacy and reading difficulties, with a focus on the nexus between oral language and literacy.

References

ACARA (2020). Australian Curriculum, National Literacy Learning Progression. Downloaded 3/2/2020 from https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/national-literacy-and-numeracy-learning-progressions/national-literacy-learning-progression/reading-and-viewing/

Arrow, A. W., McLachlan, C. J., & Greaney, K. T. (2015). Teacher knowledge needed for differentiated early reading instruction. In W. E. Tunmer & J. W. Chapman (Eds.), *Excellence and equity in literacy instruction: The case of New Zealand* (pp. 194–213). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Boyer, N. & Ehri, L. C. (2011). Contribution of phonemic segmentation instruction with letters and articulation pictures to word reading and spelling in beginners. *Scientific Studies of Reading, 15:5*, 440-470.

Bruce, D. J. (1964). The analysis of word sounds by young children. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 34*(2), 1158-170.

Castles, A. & Coltheart, M. (2004). Is there a causal link from phonological awareness to success in learning to read? *Cognition, 91*, 77-111.

Ehri, L.C. (1987). Learning to read and spell words. *Journal of Reading Behaviour, 19(1)* 5-31.

Ehri, L.C. (1989). The development of spelling knowledge and its role in reading acquisition and reading disability. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 22*, 356-365.

Ehri, L. C. (2014). Orthographic mapping in the acquisition of sight word reading, spelling memory, and vocabulary learning. *Scientific Studies of Reading, 18(1)*, 5-21.

Ehri, L.C. & Snowling, M.J. (2004). Developmental variation in word recognition. In C. A. Stone, E.R. Silliman, B.J. Ehren & K. Apel (Eds.) *Handbook of Language and Literacy Development and Disorders*, pp. 433-460. Guildford Press, NY.

Ehri, L. C & Wilce, I. (1980). The influence of orthography on readers' conceptualization of the phonemic structure of words. *Applied Psycholinguistics, 1*, 371-385.

Fielding-Barnsley, R. & Purdie, N. (2005). Teachers' attitude to and knowledge of metalinguistics in the process of learning to read. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 33(1)*, 65-76.

Kilpatrick, D. A. (2015). *Essentials of Assessing, Preventing and Overcoming Reading Difficulties*. John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, NJ.

Kilpatrick, D. A. (2016). *Equipped for Reading Success*. Casey & Kirsch, Syracuse, NY.

International Literacy Association (2020). *Phonological Awareness in Early Childhood Literacy Development*. Downloaded on 3/2/2020 from https://literacyworldwide.org/docs/default-source/where-we-stand/9457_Phonological_Awareness_1-2020_Final.pdf

Moats, L. C. (2000). *Speech to Print*. Paul Brookes Publishing, Baltimore.

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) (2000). Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read. Washington, DC. Downloaded 3/2/2020 from https://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/nrp/smallbook

Neilson, R. (2003). *Sutherland Phonological Test-Revised*. Language, Speech and Literacy Services, Jamberoo, NSW.

Neilson, R. (2009). The assessment of phonological awareness in low-progress readers. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties 14(1)*, 53-66.

Neilson, R. (2014a). *Astronaut Invented Spelling Test-2*. Language, Speech and Literacy Services, Jamberoo, NSW.

Neilson, R. (2014b). *School Entry Alphabetic and Phonological Awareness Reading Test*. Language, Speech and Literacy Services, Jamberoo, NSW.

Neilson, R. (2016). *Foundations of Early Literacy Assessment*. Language, Speech and Literacy Services, Jamberoo, NSW.

Parker, S. (2019). *Reading Instruction and Phonics* (2nd Ed.) Downloaded 3/2/2020 from https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FZndvfTq9nFNzfmUGpGN8eKDThG8wwmN/view

Piasta, S. B., Connor, C. M., Fishman, B. J., & Morrison, F. J. (2009). Teachers' knowledge of literacy concepts, classroom practices, and student reading growth. *Scientific Studies of Reading, 13*, 224–248.10.1080/10888430902851364

Rosner, J. (1979). *Test of Auditory Analysis Skills*. Academic Therapy Pubs., Novato, CA.

Stuart, M. (1990) Processing strategies in a phoneme deletion task. *The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology Section A: Human Experimental Psychology, 42(2)*, 305-327.

Tunmer, W.E. & Nesdale, A.R. (1982). The effects of digraphs and pseudowords on phonemic segmentation in young children. *Applied Psycholinguistics, 3*, 299-311.

Tunmer, W. E. & Nesdale, A. R. (1985). Phonemic segmentation skill and beginning reading. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 77(4)*, 417-427.

Washburn, E. K., Joshi, R. M., & Binks-Cantrell, E. S. (2011). Teacher knowledge of basic language concepts and dyslexia. *Dyslexia: An International Journal of Research and Practice, 17*, 165–183.

Dyslexia and Equity: A more inclusive approach to reading difficulties

James Chapman and **William Tunmer** consider the use of the term dyslexia in identifying children with reading difficulties, and whether the use of this term leads to effective and equitable practices in supporting students experiencing difficulties in learning to read.

Introduction

In this paper we consider whether the category of *dyslexia* is a useful classification that has the potential to lead to effective and equitable policies and educational practices for students who experience reading difficulties. We discuss definitions of dyslexia, research on the causes of dyslexia, identification procedures, remedial intervention and teacher preparation. We conclude the paper with suggestions for effective approaches for meeting the needs of students with reading difficulties in an equitable and inclusive manner.

Definitions of Dyslexia

In their comprehensive treatment of dyslexia in the *The Dyslexia Debate*, Elliott and Grigorenko (2014) note that defining dyslexia is both very easy and very difficult. It is easy because most people involved in researching and treating dyslexia agree that the definition should refer to the "inherent and particular difficulties encountered by those who struggle to read text" (Elliot & Grigorenko, 2014, p. 5). It is difficult because researchers and professionals have been unable to develop a universally accepted definition that is research-based, precise, distinct, and open to clear implementation. Without a clear, widely accepted definition that can be applied reliably and accurately, it is impossible to understand the nature, causes, and best treatments for dyslexia (Elliott & Grigorenko, 2014). Nonetheless, education agencies, professional organisations and advocacy groups in various countries have published definitions of dyslexia.

The UK government-sponsored Rose Report (Rose, 2009) referred to dyslexia as "a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling" (p. 30). The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) defined dyslexia as:

> a specific learning difficulty that mainly affects the development of literacy and language related skills. It is likely to be present at birth and to be life-long in its effects. It is characterised by difficulties with phonological processing, rapid naming, working memory, processing speed, and the automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual's other cognitive abilities. It is particularly related to mastering and using written language, which may include alphabetic, numeric and musical notation. (British Dyslexia Association, 2007, retrieved from: *http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/dyslexic/definitions*)

The wealth of scientific evidence does not support the view that dyslexia is present at birth, that it can involve numeracy and musical notation, and that the skills may not "match up to an individual's other cognitive abilities" (Elliott & Grigorenko, 2014).

The fifth edition of the American

Psychiatric Association's (2013) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM-5) dropped the term dyslexia in their formal definition of specific learning disorders related to reading. The main reason was because the various international conceptions and understandings of dyslexia lacked scientific support. Instead, the DSM-5 refers to *specific learning disorders*, of which reading (word accuracy, fluency, and reading comprehension) and written expression (spelling, grammar and punctuation, and clarity/organisation of written expression) are included as literacy-related domains of difficulty. The term *dyslexia* is however recognised as a descriptive term that is used to refer to a pattern of learning difficulties that is characterised by problems with accurate or fluent word recognition, poor decoding, and poor spelling abilities.

The U.S.-based International Dyslexia Association (IDA) has retained the term *dyslexia*:

> Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading

experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. (IDA; retrieved from *http://eida.org/definition-of-dyslexia/*)

Dyslexia and Intelligence

A long-standing view held by advocates of the concept of dyslexia is that the learning problems are not the result of low intelligence (e.g., BDA definition). Rather, there is a subgroup of specific literacy learning difficulties (dyslexia) that is biological in origin (as opposed to environmental) and that normally occurs in students who have at least average levels of intelligence or cognitive functioning. Either explicitly or implicitly, dyslexia has been viewed as involving a discrepancy between IQ and reading performance (Siegel, 1989; Stanovich, 1991; Tunmer & Greaney, 2010).

However, there is virtually no robust scientific evidence to back the view that a discrepancy between IQ and achievement is a useful predictor of dyslexic poor readers (Seigel, 1989; Siegel & Hurford, 2019). Dyslexics are assumed to have average to high IQs, whereas "garden variety" poor readers are thought to have reading problems as a result of general cognitive weaknesses (low IQs). But many studies have shown that IQ scores cannot distinguish between poor readers who can supposedly benefit from remedial programmes (dyslexics), and those who are more resistant to intervention (non-dyslexic poor readers) (Elliott & Grigorenko, 2014).

Stanovich (2005) summarised key findings from research on the use of IQ for assessing the nature of reading difficulties as follows: a) the main problem for children with severe reading difficulties is word recognition; b) weak phonological coding skills are the main psychological process underlying problems with word recognition; and, c) both phonological skills and word-recognition problems can be remediated (at least in large part) with intensive intervention. Stanovich (2005) emphasised that none of these three factors "correlate at all with IQ" (p. 104). Intelligence tests, including tests of cognitive abilities, have little value in diagnosing dyslexia. Most contemporary definitions no longer make reference to a discrepancy between IQ and achievement.

The continued use of measures of cognitive abilities that are not directly related to reading, however, indicate that general cognitive factors are still considered important in diagnosing dyslexia. Such measures are superfluous (Siegel & Hurford, 2019). Word reading difficulties, and reading comprehension, can be assessed by classroom teachers without the need for expensive and time-consuming tests that are often inaccessible to students and parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Siegel & Hurford, 2019).

Dyslexia and the "Exclusion" Factor

For many years dyslexia was defined in terms of significant and ongoing reading problems experienced by children with at least average intelligence and whose difficulties were solely biological in origin. This conceptualisation means that dyslexia is not the result of socio-economic disadvantage, emotional or behavioural problems that could impact on learning, physical or sensory impairments (e.g., visual or hearing problems), or inadequate schooling or poor teaching (Chapman, 1992). The argument was that all of these factors could lead to reading difficulties, but that these reading difficulties were not dyslexia. Rather, dyslexia was thought to be ongoing difficulty with reading *after those factors were excluded*.

The socio-economic disadvantage factor is especially problematic. It would be inequitable if distinctions between dyslexic and non-dyslexic poor readers were made on the basis of observable socio-economic background and unobservable biological causal factors. Given that one of the aims of having the category of dyslexia is to enable differential expectations and perceptions, and access to additional resourcing that might result from these, children from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds would be denied such additional resources. Further, as Brady (2019) noted, "there is increasing evidence that socioeconomic disadvantages can effect children's brain development" (p. 19). Moreover, citing Fletcher et al. (2019), Brady (2019) added that "it is not possible at the individual level to distinguish between the characteristics of cases of biologically based and environmentally induced dyslexia" (p. 19).

Simply put, children from less well-off backgrounds who experience persistent and complex reading difficulties do not usually receive the diagnosis of dyslexia, because the difficulties are attributed to environmental circumstances, such as home background, rather than to neurobiological factors. Yet it is impossible to distinguish between neurobiological or environmental factors when it comes to designing appropriate teaching interventions for those with complex reading difficulties. As Elliott and Grigorenko (2014) note, "current biological evidence for a dyslexic subgroup does not yet permit diagnosis at the individual level" (p. 11).

Research on the Biological Basis of Dyslexia

Dyslexia is usually considered to have a biological basis, as indicated earlier. Advocacy groups in particular (e.g., BDA, IDA) argue that it is important to differentiate reading difficulties that have a biological basis (dyslexia) from those that do not. Some argue that it relieves students, parents, and teachers from any sense of causal responsibility or guilt for reading difficulties (e.g., Warnke, Schulte-Korne & Ise, 2012). Contemporary scientific research, however, has not provided clear and educationally *useable* evidence regarding the biological basis of dyslexia, no matter how much many people would wish that this were so.

> … current biological evidence for a dyslexic subgroup does not yet permit diagnosis at the individual level …

Elliott and Grigorenko (2014) note that specific areas of the brain are involved in typical and atypical reading, but that research findings so far cannot be used for diagnostic purposes or to guide instructional interventions. Moreover, there are significant challenges in generalising to individuals the results from the studies on neurological biomarkers; there is a high degree of variation in the causes and characteristics of both typical and atypical reading.

Identification Procedures

Identification procedures traditionally focused on psychometric tests designed to demonstrate that dyslexic

poor readers were different from non-dyslexic poor readers partly because they had average or above average IQs. As we have already indicated, this IQ-achievement discrepancy approach is flawed and has been dropped from most operational definitions and identification approaches. However, an ongoing part of identification procedures is to use tests to infer specific types of cognitive and neurological functions.

Batteries of cognitive assessments (e.g., the Woodcock-Johnson Test of Cognitive Abilities) are often used to help categorise students as dyslexic, and to distinguish their reading difficulties as being different from those of non-dyslexic poor readers. Such assessments have failed to reliably distinguish between the two subgroups of poor readers. This has been known since the early 1980s (e.g., Kavale & Forness, 1984). Vellutino, Fletcher, Snowling and Scanlon (2004), all leading reading scientists, recommended that those whose role it is to diagnose dyslexia/reading difficulties, should avoid psychometric assessments "to detect cognitive and biological causes of a child's reading difficulties for purposes of categorical labelling in favour of assessment that would eventuate in educational and remedial activities tailored to the child's individual needs" (p. 31). As Odegard (2019) recently noted, "Parents and educators desperately want a single measure that can be administered to make the call of dyslexia… such a measure does not exist" (p. 13).

Siegel and Hurford (2019) argue that using psychometric tests to develop a profile of strengths and weaknesses is a waste of time and money. Such profiles "do not predict who will benefit from remediation or what particular intervention strategy should be employed. This is particularly the case for individuals with reading difficulties" (p. 26).

Intervention Approaches

Definitions of dyslexia typically refer to difficulties in reading and spelling, despite children having received "effective classroom instruction" (e.g., IDA: *https://dyslexiaida.org/definition-of-dyslexia/*). Few, if any, studies of dyslexia include a systematic and robust analysis of "effective classroom instruction". The probability that many children who struggle with reading do so because of inappropriate or poor teaching seldom seems to be considered. Yet it is likely that many children diagnosed as being dyslexic may be *teaching casualties*. This situation is likely to be especially prevalent for children whose classroom reading instruction is based on the multiple cues, whole language approach.

Many children who, for whatever reason, do not possess sufficient levels of essential reading-related skills when they start school, tend to develop ineffective word identification strategies that are *encouraged* in the whole language approach. For example, teachers often get children to work out unknown words by using multiple cues: picture cues, guessing from the context, semantic and syntactic cues, and sometimes saying one or two letters of the unknown word (beginning or ending letters). These strategies are ineffective for many children (Tunmer, Greaney, & Prochnow, 2015). The ongoing use of such ineffective strategies usually continues to such an extent and for such a long time that the strategies become entrenched and difficult to unlearn (Prochnow, Tunmer, & Arrow, 2015).

Yet it is likely that many children diagnosed as being dyslexic may be teaching casualties. This situation is likely to be especially prevalent for children whose classroom reading instruction is based on the multiple cues, whole language approach.

Reliance on ineffective literacy learning strategies frequently has enormous negative consequences for children (Prochnow et al., 2015). Relatively small differences in essential literacy-related skills during early reading instruction often develop into large generalized differences in academic achievement. Stanovich (1986) referred to this as a "Matthew effect"; the "rich get richer and the poor get poorer". Those who get off to a good start in learning to read generally do well with reading to learn. Those who struggle at the outset of learning to read often develop more generalised learning problems. These general learning problems are very similar to many of the characteristics of dyslexia listed on some websites (e.g., IDA), such as memory problems, organisation problems, attentional problems, and motivational problems.

An Instructional Approach for *All* Children with Reading Difficulties.

If beginning readers are not making satisfactory progress in learning to read, research clearly indicates that in most cases it is because they are having problems understanding the language being read (i.e., language comprehension), problems recognizing the words of text quickly and accurately (i.e., word recognition), or both (Tunmer & Hoover, 2019). Weakness in word recognition skills usually stems from insufficient explicit instruction in alphabetic coding skills or lack of opportunities to practice and receive feedback on using alphabetic coding skills while reading. If alphabetic coding skills are still weak despite explicit instruction and practice, it is usually because students have inadequate knowledge of the alphabetic principle, letter knowledge, or phonemic awareness. All of these skills need to be explicitly taught to those children who lack them, *regardless of the reasons*.

The explicit teaching of strategies for reading and spelling provides children with the ability to read increasingly large numbers of words quickly and automatically. Automatic word reading is important because it lets children focus on the meaning of the text they are reading, instead of getting bogged down trying to work out key words. As children learn word patterns, they must also learn how to use the word patterns for attempting to read and spell new words (Tunmer et al., 2015). This strategic use of word patterns should be explicitly stated and explicitly taught so that children learn how to use this knowledge on a spontaneous basis. Teaching word patterns (or phonic patterns) is seldom done systematically in many Australian and New Zealand schools.

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

To effectively teach reading skills to children requires that teachers have a high level of understanding of the basic structure of the English language (Joshi et al., 2009). This knowledge is

even more important if teachers are to effectively help children with reading difficulties (Arrow et al., 2015).

For children who have early and ongoing reading difficulties, teacher knowledge is likely to be the critical element that influences the child's future success or failure in learning to read. Unless children with initial reading difficulties receive specialist instruction, up to 75% of students who struggle with reading in their third or fourth year of schooling will remain poor readers at secondary school (Francis et al., 1996), and on into adulthood (Chapman, Greaney & Prochnow, 2015). For this reason, we argue that it is important that all students receive early reading instruction that includes explicit instruction in the phonological aspects of the English language. However, this is not likely to occur unless the teachers themselves have a good working knowledge of these necessary language elements.

Tunmer and Hoover (2019), in their discussion of the *Cognitive Foundations of Learning to Read*, draw attention to two key questions that competent teachers and remedial specialists can answer about their practice: what are you doing and why are you doing it? Being able to answer these questions involves a broad understanding of children's cognitive capacities involved in learning to read, including knowing the typical developmental patterns associated with reading acquisition. Effective teachers can identify what beginning or struggling readers know and what they still need to know to become skilled readers. And following that, they can provide their students with targeted, evidence-based instruction.

Initial teacher education programmes are particularly important. A number of reports and publications on the nature of teacher education in literacy have indicated that pre-service teachers need instruction in the key components of reading, including phonic knowledge, vocabulary, and reading comprehension (Fillmore Wong & Snow, 2000; Moats, 1999; National Inquiry into the Teaching of Reading, 2005; National Reading Panel, 2000; Rose, 2006; Snow & Juel, 2005; Status of Reading Instruction Institute, 2007). All agree that a skilled teacher is crucial to bring the components of learning to read together for all students.

However, many teacher educators do not have adequate literacy-related knowledge to teach their pre-service student teachers. Both Bos et al. (2001) and Joshi et al. (2009) found that many teacher educators had low levels of explicit linguistic knowledge, which suggests that they would not be able to effectively teach that content to their students. In addition to the lack of knowledge for directly teaching pre-service teachers, textbook choices for supporting courses in literacy may also be inadequate. Teacher education practices in colleges of education suggest that many (maybe most) teacher educators lack sufficient knowledge of how to teach reading effectively to *all* children (e.g., Buckingham, Wheldall, & Beaman-Wheldall, 2013; Carroll, Gillon, & McNeill, 2012).

> … the dyslexia category, as currently defined, will cause inequity and injustice.

Conclusion

Official use of the term *dyslexia* is as much a hindrance to change, as a rallying point for more effective reading instruction and resources for intervention. Instead, we argue that the focus ought to be on effective classroom instruction and remedial intervention for *all* students who experience reading difficulties, regardless of the assumed causes. In taking this viewpoint we acknowledge that the term *dyslexia* may meet the psychological, social, political, and emotional needs of many stakeholders. However, the needs of stakeholders must take into account reliable scientific evidence, as well as the political and social reality that the dyslexia category, as currently defined, will cause inequity and injustice. *Reading difficulties* is a concept that can be based on scientific evidence, and can be far more inclusive and appropriate.

In conclusion, we assert that policies and practices must change to develop an approach to literacy education that ensures all children who go to school, regardless of their circumstances (biological or environmental), have approximately the same probability of success in learning to read and write; that is, an approach that does not continue to contribute to inequality in society.

Professor James Chapman is a Professor Emeritus in the College of Humanities & Social Sciences at Massey University, in Palmerston North, New Zealand. He has published over 150 journal articles, book chapters and books on learning disabilities, special education, literacy learning difficulties, early literacy development, reading intervention, and self-system factors in academic achievement. Professor Chapman is a Fellow of the International Academy for Research in Learning Disabilities (and past President), and Science Advisor for the Foundational Learning Success Project at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand. He serves on the editorial boards of numerous journals, including the Journal of Learning Disabilities, the Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties, and the Asia Pacific Journal of Developmental Differences. In 1999 he was co-winner of the International Reading Association's Dina Feitelson Award for Excellence in Research

Professor William Tunmer is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Educational Psychology in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Massey University in New Zealand. He has contributed significantly to research in the area of reading, and is probably best known for the paper he co-authored in 1986 with Philip Gough which first proposed the 'simple view of reading'. He was the recipient of the AJLD Eminent Researcher Award in 2019, and his article, co-authored with Wesley Hoover, on 'The cognitive foundations of learning to read: a framework for preventing and remediating reading difficulties', was published in the May 2019 Issue of the Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties.

References

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*, 5th ed. (DSM-5). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.

Arrow, A.W., Chapman, J.W., & Greaney, K.T. (2015). Meeting the needs of beginning readers through differentiated instruction. In W.E. Tunmer & J.W. Chapman (Eds.), *Excellence and equity in literacy instruction: The case of New Zealand* (pp. 171-193). Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bos, C., Mather, N., Dickson, S., Podhajski, B., & Chard, D. (2001). Perceptions and knowledge of preservice and inservice educators about early reading instruction. *Annals of Dyslexia, 51*, 97-120.

Brady, S. (2019). The 2003 IDA definition of dyslexia: A call for changes. *Perspectives on Language and Literacy,*

45(1), 15-21.

British Dyslexia Association. (2007). *Definitions*. Retrieved from: *http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/dyslexic/definitions*

Buckingham, J., Wheldall, K., & Beaman-Wheldall, R. (2013). Why Jaydon can't read: The triumph of ideology over evidence in teaching reading. *Policy, 29*(3), 21-32. Retrieved from: *http://www.chrisbauman.com.au/Content/Documents/Teaching%20reading-jennifer-buckingham.pdf*

Carroll, J., Gillon, G., & McNeill, B. Explicit phonological knowledge of educational professionals. *Asia Pacific Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing, 15*(4), 231-244. DOI: 10.1179/136132812804731820

Chapman, J.W., (1992). Learning disabilities in New Zealand: Where kiwis and kids with LD can't fly. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 25*, 362-370.

Chapman, J.W., Greaney, K.T., & Prochnow, J.E. (2015). Literacy performances of young adults in New Zealand: Outcomes of school-based literacy instruction. In W.E. Tunmer & J.W. Chapman (Eds.), *Excellence and equity in literacy instruction: The case of New Zealand* (pp. 71-92). Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

Elliott, J.G., & Grigorenko, E.L. (2014). *The dyslexia debate*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Fillmore Wong, L., & Snow, C. (2000). *What teachers need to know about language* (ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistic Special Report). Washington DC: Center for Applied Linguistics; Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Retrieved from *http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED444379.pdf*

Francis, D.J., Shaywitz, S.E., Stuebing, K.K., Shaywitz, B.A., & Fletcher, J.M. (1996). Developmental lag versus deficit models of reading disability: A longitudinal, individual growth curves analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 88*, 3-17.

International Dyslexia Association. (2015). *Definition of dyslexia*. Retrieved from: *http://eida.org/definition-of-dyslexia/*

Joshi, R. M., Binks, E., Hougen, M., Dahlgren, M. E., Ocker-Dean, E., & Smith, D. L. (2009). Why elementary teachers might be inadequately prepared to teach reading. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 42*, 392–402.

Kavale, K.A., & Forness, S.R. (1984). A meta-analysis of the validity of the Wechsler scale profiles and recategorizations: Patterns or parodies? *Learning Disability Quarterly, 7*, 136-156.

Moats, L. (1999). *Teaching reading is rocket science: What expert teachers of reading should know and be able to do*. Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers.

National Inquiry into the teaching of reading. (2005). *Teaching reading: Report and recommendations*. Canberra, ACT: DEST, Australian Government.

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction reports of the subgroups* (No. BBB35631). Bethesda, MD: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Odegard, T.N. (2019). Dyslexia defined: Historical trends and the current reality. *Perspectives on Language and Literacy, 45*(1), 11-14.

Prochnow, J.E., Tunmer, W.E., & Arrow, A.W. (2015). Literate cultural capital and Matthew effects in reading achievement. In W.E. Tunmer & J.W. Chapman (Eds.), *Excellence and equity in literacy instruction: The case of New Zealand* (pp. 145-167). Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rose, J. (2006). *Independent review of the Teaching of Early Reading: Final report*. London: Department of Education and Skills.

Rose, J. (2009). *Identifying and teaching children and young people with dyslexia and literacy difficulties*. Nottingham, England: DCSF Publications.

Siegel, L. (1989). Why we do not need intelligence test scores in the definition and analyses of learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 22*(8), 514-518.

Siegel, L. S., & Hurford, D.P. (2019). The case against discrepancy models in the evaluation of dyslexia. *Perspectives on Language and Literacy, 45*(1), 23-32.

Snow, C. E., & Juel, C. (2005). Teaching children to read: What do we know about how to do it? In M. J. Snowling & C. Hulme (Eds.), *The science of reading: A handbook* (pp. 501–520). Oxford: Blackwell.

Stanovich, K.E. (1986). Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the development of reading fluency. *Reading Research Quarterly, 21*, 360-407.

Stanovich, K.E. (2005). The future of a mistake: Will discrepancy measurement continue to make the learning disabilities field a pseudoscience? *Learning Disability Quarterly, 28*, 103-106.

Status of Reading Instruction Institute. (2007). *Teaching reading well: A synthesis of the international reading association's research on teacher preparation for reading instruction*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Tunmer, W.E., & Greaney, K.T. (2010). Defining dyslexia. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 43*, 229-243.

Tunmer, W.E., Greaney, K.T., & Prochnow, J.E. (2015). Pedagogical constructivism in New Zealand literacy education: A flawed approach to teaching reading. In W.E. Tunmer & J.W. Chapman (Eds.), *Excellence and Equity in Literacy Education: The Case of New Zealand* (pp. 121-144). Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tunmer, W.E., & Hoover, W.A. (2019). The cognitive foundations of learning to read: A framework for preventing and remediating reading difficulties. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties, 24*(1), 75-93. DOI:10.1080/19404158.2019.1614081

Vellutino, F.R., Fletcher, J.M., Snowling, M.J., & Scanlon, D.M. (2004). Specific reading disability (dyslexia): What have we learned in the past four decades? *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 45*, 2-40.

Warnke, A., Schulte-Korne, G., & Ise, E. (2012). Developmental dyslexia. In M.E. Garralda & J. Raynaud (Eds.), *Brain, mind, and developmental pathology in childhood* (pp. 173-198). Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson Publishing.

In Defence of Truth: A reply to 57 Reading Voices on the Issue of Dyslexia

Steve Dykstra replies to a letter from 57 academics following a program on the US Public Broadcasting System in April 2019, which triggered a debate on the existence of dyslexia as an identifiable condition and whether it can be ameliorated by specific instructional approaches.

Recently, a collection of professors and others wrote a letter to officials at the Public Broadcasting System, taking issue with reports on dyslexia that aired on PBS. The signatories of this letter are a list of some of the best-known and most influential reading voices of the past several decades. They are past presidents and officials of the International Literacy Association, members of The Reading Hall of Fame, and authors of books and curricula found in most of the schools and nearly all of the universities in North America. The link to the letter, at *https://readingrecovery.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Concern-letter-to-PBS.pdf*, is hosted by the Reading Recovery Council of North America, purveyor of the widely-marketed Reading Recovery intervention program, completing the triangle with the ILA and university professors that has defined reading instruction and policy in this country for the past 40 years. The common purpose of these partners is to undermine the work of parents and grass roots organizations working to promote the science of reading in opposition to the discredited philosophies, ineffective practices, and failed products the 57 signatories prefer.

The letter makes two arguments: dyslexia is a vague and useless concept describing a condition which they imply may not be real, and there is no agreed upon treatment for dyslexia. They cite three sources in their argument: The American Psychiatric Association, Julian Elliott and Elena Grigorenko's book, The Dyslexia Debate (2014), and the International Literacy Association. It is important to note that many of the 57 signatories of the letter are or have been major leaders of the ILA, so they are essentially citing themselves. While there are many scientific sources which solidly dispute the claims in the letter, this reply is focused on the two independent sources the letter cites, which I will address one at a time.

Dyslexia, the DSM 5, and the American Psychiatric Association

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM 5) is a publication of the American Psychiatric Association. The first substantive argument made in the letter is that the APA expressed ambivalence about the validity of dyslexia. *"That ambivalence is reflected in the American Psychiatric Association's decision to drop dyslexia as a diagnostic category in the current edition of its Diagnostic Statistical Manual, that field's most respected and widely used reference source." (page 1 of the letter).*

Had the APA expressed ambivalence about dyslexia or removed it from the DSM, this would be an important argument. However, it is untrue, and no matter how many times the signatories or their followers repeat it, it will remain untrue. The APA did not drop dyslexia from the DSM 5, and they freely use the term without ambivalence.

The source of their false claim is a 2013 document from the APA entitled, Specific Learning Disorder (Appendix B) that includes the following sentence: *"The DSM-5 Neurodevelopmental Work Group concluded that the many definitions of dyslexia and dyscalculia meant those terms would not be useful as disorder names or in the diagnostic criteria."* Since that sentence was published 6 years ago, many who dispute dyslexia and reading science have latched on to it to claim the DSM does not include dyslexia and the APA finds the diagnosis problematic.

The APA did not drop dyslexia from the DSM5, and they freely use the term without ambivalence.

In fact, the sentence only refers to the decision to keep the previous taxonomic structure of the DSM, using the term "Specific Learning Disorder" as an umbrella category which includes more specific impairments in math, decoding, writing, and a variety of other specific skills. Rather than address each of these specific impairments as a category unto itself, the APA chose to maintain the previous structure that treats different learning issues as subtypes of Specific Learning Disorder.

This is abundantly clear if the sentence is seen in fuller context:

"Just as in DSM-IV, dyslexia will be included in the descriptive text of specific learning disorder. The DSM-5 Neurodevelopmental Work Group concluded that the many definitions of dyslexia and dyscalculia meant those terms would not be useful as disorder names or in the diagnostic criteria." As the document clearly states, dyslexia is included, just as it was in the past. The APA did not *"drop dyslexia as a diagnostic category in the current edition of its Diagnostic Statistical Manual"* as the letter claims. If any signatories of the letter wanted to check, they could have looked at page 67 of the DSM 5, which includes the following guidance:

"Dyslexia is an alternative term used to refer to a pattern of learning difficulties characterized by problems with accurate or fluent word recognition, poor decoding, and poor spelling abilities."

Including dyslexia as an alternative term should not be taken as ambivalence for the term. The DSM does not commonly allow alternative terminology. This example, along with similar allowances for dyscalculia and dysgraphia, are among the very few, possibly the only, such allowances. Far from distancing the DSM from dyslexia, it embraces the term by going well outside normal practice, as it did in the previous editions, contrary to the false claim in the letter.

This is all public knowledge, widely published and explained. It is found in the very document the signatories so often cite, and the DSM 5 itself to which they refer, but apparently never read.

If the signatories needed more evidence of the APA's attitude toward dyslexia, they could have reviewed the 2018 APA document on Specific Learning Disorders (Appendix C) that lists the three types of Learning Disorders as "dyslexia," "dysgraphia," and "dyscalculia." The APA uses these allegedly problematic terms with neither ambivalence nor apology. The document uses the term dyslexia eight times, preferring it to alternative terms which are used less often. Furthermore, the APA, recognized as an expert source by the signatories of the letter, refers readers to the International Dyslexia Association, a source the signatories disparage, for more information, but makes no mention of the International Literacy Association, a source the signatories are trying to promote. The APA not only doesn't take the position the letter signatories claim. In important ways, they take the opposite position. This is most striking when we consider the APA's guidance on the treatment of dyslexia, found in the treatment section of 2018 paper:

"Research has shown that the most effective treatments for reading disorder are structured, targeted strategies that address phonological awareness, decoding skills, comprehension and fluency."

This strikes at the heart of the signatories ' second claim: that no way of treating dyslexia has been shown to be most effective. The APA, one of only two independent sources cited in the letter, specifically names an instructional approach which the ILA and signatories of the letter so often publicly dispute.

The Dyslexia Debate, Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014

This important work argues that the term dyslexia serves little purpose in the educational realm, and may do more harm than good by encouraging excessive effort to distinguish dyslexic children from other struggling readers. The authors do not, as the letter implies, dispute the existence of dyslexia. Instead, they take issue with the possible confusion of dyslexia with other causes of early reading difficulty. While many other scholars and scientists take a different view, there is no doubt that *The Dyslexia Debate* (2014) is an important and serious work of scholarship.

> Research has shown that the most effective treatments for reading disorder are structured, targeted strategies that address phonological awareness, decoding skills, comprehension and fluency'

It must be noted, however, that Elliott and Grigorenko are approaching the issue from both a scientific and practical perspective. Those are two separate debates, but the practical debate is worth understanding in reply to the letter.

The core of Elliott and Grigorenko's practical argument is that spending precious time and resources separating dyslexic children from other struggling readers is wasteful since they all need the same approach, tailored to the needs of each child, built on systematic instruction in the alphabetic principle. Elliott and Grigorenko are unambiguous as to what that instruction must include. Chapter 4 of the book is a systematic take down of whole language and so-called "balanced" approaches that minimize phonics and related skills.

"… the suggestion that a common balanced approach is suitable for all children is overly simplistic and potentially misleading… Irrespective of the child's skills, however, it is now widely accepted that a systematic phonics approach usually leads to superior skills when compared to a non-phonics or nonsystematic phonics approach." (The Dyslexia Debate, Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014, pp, 129-130)

Rather than trust my own understanding of their work, I wrote to Julian Elliot to check my interpretation of their position. I wrote:

"Here in the US, and elsewhere I believe, the diagnosis of dyslexia has been seen as the tool for unlocking needed intervention. Sadly, it does not in most cases. These children continue to get mostly the same instruction with a heavy dose of multiple cues and various strategies which minimize and obscure the importance of the alphabetic code. As one reading specialist said to me, she teaches phonics to struggling readers if she sees they really need it, whenever they get stuck on a word and nothing else works. The idea of something more planned and systematic was offensive to her."

For me, the finite resources argument is pierced if we simply build the decoding aspect of instruction around those elements science tells us matter most (phonics, phonology, phoneme awareness, morphology, etc) and stop spending precious resources (including time) on approaches which do far less good."

Elliott replied:

"Quite agree, Steve."

> Here in the US, and elsewhere …the diagnosis of dyslexia has been seen as the tool for unlocking needed intervention. Sadly, it does not in most cases…

While I did not reach out to Elena Grigorenko, it is worth mentioning that she serves on the Scientific Board of Directors of the International Dyslexia Association, an organization maligned by the signatories.

The letter cites Elliot and Grigorenko without understanding their work. It takes their questions about the term dyslexia out of context and ignores the reasoning behind them. Elliott and Grigorenko support the kind of instruction many of the signatories reject, the kind of instruction the signatories say is not especially effective in addressing reading difficulties. The only way you can accept Elliot and Grigorenko's argument about dyslexia is to also accept their clear argument that all struggling readers, and all beginning readers, benefit from the same systematic, code-based instruction the letter says is unproven and the signatories of the letter have spent their careers resisting.

Summary

The 57 signatories of the letter made a number of false claims, including that the APA rejects dyslexia, that the DSM-5 dropped dyslexia as a diagnosis, and that there is no agreed upon best approach to remediating dyslexia. By promoting this misinformation, the signatories themselves are responsible for creating much of the confusion over the term "dyslexia" that they decry. While Elliott and Grigorenko do question the term dyslexia (but not the existence of the disorder) and make important arguments against its use, they do so because all children who struggle to read need the same thing, an approach the letter disputes and many of the signatories have worked against for most or all of their careers.

While Elliott and Grigorenko do question the term dyslexia (but not the existence of the disorder) and make important arguments against its use, they do so because all children who struggle to read need the same thing...

We must consider what it says about the state of reading instruction and scholarship that a letter so thick with lies and so thin with facts could attract so many signatures from so many people of influence. By making claims about the DSM and reading instruction which are so clearly untrue, by building an argument on lies and half-truths, the signatories have revealed the source of major problems, and it is not in the use of the term "dyslexia."

Dr Stephen Dykstra is a clinical psychologist in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and has worked in public sector, community mental health for more than 25 years. He is a founding member of the Wisconsin Reading Coalition, and Vice President of the Coalition for Reading Excellence.

LDA Awards

LDA offers a series of annual Awards that are designed to recognise outstanding work in the field of learning difficulties. These Awards are as follows:

The Mona Tobias Award, which is presented in recognition of an outstanding contribution to the field of learning difficulties in Australia.

The Bruce Wicking Award, which recognises an individual or organisation for innovative programs or practices relating to the teaching of children with learning difficulties.

The Tertiary Student Award, which is presented in recognition of academic excellence and significant research which advances the understanding of theoretical and practical issues in the field of learning difficulties, carried out by a student in the course of their tertiary level studies.

The Rosemary Carter Award, which recognises an outstanding LDA Consultant member who has contributed to the education of struggling students.

There are also two AJLD Awards which are presented by Taylor and Francis, the publishers of the Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties. These are:

1. The Early Career Researcher Award, which is based on the submission of a paper appropriate for publication in the Journal, and
2. The Eminent Researcher Award, which is designed to recognise significant contributions by eminent researchers in the field of learning difficulties, and is awarded by invitation.

Further information about these Awards is provided on the LDA website, at *https://www.ldaustralia.org/ldaajld-awards.html*

What's in a name?

Peter Westwood argues that a name is important, especially in the field of learning difficulties. To paraphrase Shakespeare, "He who steals my purse steals trash but he who steals my good name steals everything I have."

How do tutors and support teachers in Australia think of and refer to the students they work with? Do they refer to them as a category of special need (dyslexic, ADHD, handicapped, intellectually disabled, mildly autistic, slow learners, low-achievers, Tier 3)? Or simply as Naomi or Jill or Darren or Isaac—just kids who need a bit of extra help? It is interesting to look back and observe how labels have come and gone in the field of learning difficulties, with the frequent changes reflecting a shift in community attitudes, affirmative action, or simply for political correctness.

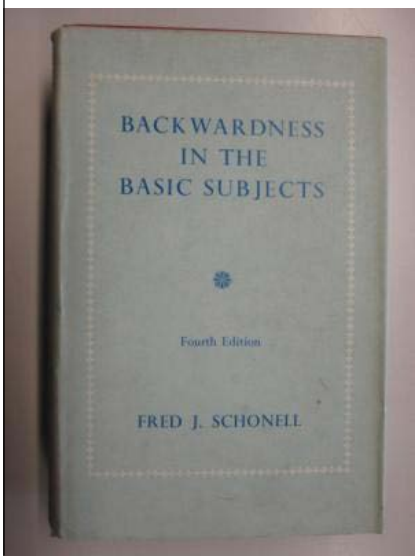
Since the earliest days of providing assistance for students with special needs a label has inevitably been created to categorize them. Funding then became linked to the label and, before the advent of inclusion, the placement of a child in a particular class or school occurred. It also appears that as soon as a category had been created, we found it necessary to subdivide it by level of severity (borderline, mild, moderate, severe) or to create sub-types within the category (phonological dyslexia, surface dyslexia, visual dyslexia, genetic dyslexia). Even the *Diagnostics and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) has had to regularly update its terminology and classifications. For example, the most recent edition (APA, 2013) found it necessary to reduce the number of sub-categories that had developed over the years under the classification 'learning disabilities'. These sub-types had become too confusing and contributed to difficulty in diagnosis. DSM-5 now simply refers to 'specific learning disorder' and then notes the academic skill area that is affected (e.g., reading, spelling, or math).

Perhaps the most awful example of sub-dividing a category that existed for many generations was in the old classification under intellectual disability (at the time called mental deficiency or mental handicap in the UK, mental retardation in the USA). This system used descending levels of cognitive competence labelled as feebleminded, moron, imbecile and idiot (Binet, 1916). It is unbelievable today that for many years an individual could go from being labelled a moron to an imbecile based on a drop of a few IQ points! It is also hard to believe that the American Association of Mental Deficiency (now called the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities) didn't officially abolish these categories and terms until 1973.

Since the earliest days of providing assistance for students with special needs a label has inevitably been created to categorize them. Funding then became linked to the label...

When I began my teaching career in England in the 1950s, the popular term for the children I was teaching was 'backward'—a term that had its origins in the writings of Cyril Burt (*The Backward Child*, 1937; *The Causes and Treatment of Backwardness*, 1953) and also in Schonell's book *Backwardness in the Basic Subjects* (1948). Schonell defined a backward student as one who 'compared with other pupils of the same chronological age shows marked educational deficiency.' It didn't take long for others to adopt the term backward and apply it to specific areas of the curriculum. Vernon (1957) for example, used it in the title of her book *Backwardness in Reading*. In Australia, McLeod (1960) was referring to 'educational backwardness: general and specific.' The term was still very much in use in the UK in the late 1960s. In some countries the term lives on today—for example, it is very popular in India (Aggarwal, 2014; Vasudevan, 2017).

In the 1950s and 1960s in England, a term 'dull child' also gained traction and appeared in the title of books such as *The education of dull children at the primary stage* (Cheshire Education Committee, 1956). Actually, the term 'dullard' or 'dull child' dates back to the early 1900's (Shields, 1909) and no one seems to have been uncomfortable using it. Fortunately, the term fell out of favour before 1970, but then the equally depressing term educationally subnormal (ESN) became popular. It was first used in the Education Act of 1944 and the Handicapped Pupils and School Health Service Regulations of 1945 (Farrell, 2014). ESN children were those who we would describe today as having mild to moderate intellectual disability and learning difficulties. They attended special schools designated as ESN schools, but unfortunately these schools also became populated by many students who were not intellectually disabled but simply hard to teach and manage. There was also a category in the UK called severely subnormal (SSN), signifying children with complex disabilities and high support needs. Australia had not been averse to using the term subnormal (or retarded), as for



example in the name of the old Bell Street School for Subnormal and Maladjusted Children in Fitzroy. It is interesting to note that concern was already being expressed about the stigmatizing effect of a word like subnormal. In 1967 the Central Advisory Council for Education (England) stated in the *Plowden Report* (1967): 'This term causes unnecessary distress to parents and we suggest that the term 'slow learners' is adopted instead' (p.301).

'Slow learner' was a term that originated in 1935 (Ingram & Martens, 1935) but had gained wide acceptance in the 1960s in the UK, USA and Australia, and was used frequently in book titles (e.g., *Education for slow learners*: Johnson, 1963; *The slow learner in the classroom*: Kephart, 1960; *The education of slow learning children*: Tansley & Gulliford, 1960). In Australia, the University of Queensland was producing a journal at that time called *The Slow Learning Child*—but also using the word backward in the subtitle *Australian Journal on the Education of Backward Children*.

The term 'learning disability' has an interesting history. It began life as 'wordblindness' in Germany in the late 1800s…

The term 'learning disability' has an interesting history. It began life as 'word-blindness' in Germany in the late 1800s (Kussmaul, 1877) and this label was later adopted in Britain by Hinshelwood (1917). In the USA, Orton was still using it in 1925 to describe what we would now term dyslexia. It wasn't until 1963 in the USA that Kirk coined the term 'learning disability' in a conference paper. At the time other categories such as 'perceptual handicap' and 'minimal neurological dysfunction' were also doing the rounds in that country. In the UK, the term 'specific reading retardation' enjoyed a brief shelf-life (Rutter & Yule, 1975). Elsewhere, learning disability gradually evolved into *specific* learning disability (SpLD) and most recently to 'learning disorder' (APA, 2013). Much later, writers in the UK managed to confuse international readers of research by deciding that the words 'learning disability' (LD) were to be used for describing those with an intellectual disability. Up to that time LD had only ever been applied to classify students of good intelligence but with a chronic difficulty learning to read, write and spell. That is certainly how it is used currently in Australia.

The term 'handicapped children' was used very widely and over a long period of time in English-speaking countries, but eventually it too came under scrutiny. The Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People in the UK decided to introduce the term 'children with special educational needs' (SEN) in the Warnock Report (1978). The committee defined this term as applying to 'children with learning problems or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn than most children the same age.' Australia was very happy to adopt this SEN term almost immediately, and it remains in popular use. The term 'special needs' has not been viewed positively by all stakeholders, some criticizing it as unnecessarily stigmatizing a particular population of children (Snow, 2016). The latest term used in the UK is Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This change occurred as a result of Part 3 of the Children and Families Act (Government of UK, 2014) and the *Special Educational Needs & Disability Code of Practice* (Department of Education/Department of Health, 2015).

Elsewhere, learning disability gradually evolved into specific learning disability (SpLD) and most recently to 'learning disorder'

The Disability Rights Movement in the 1970s saw the beginnings of what is known as 'person-first language' in writing about disability—we should say a student with autism, not an autistic student, or persons with a disability, not the disabled. It was claimed that placing the disability label first unjustifiably separates a person from the normal population by highlighting a difference. Tobin (2011) has even suggested that, 'Society at large has used these labels as a way of marginalizing others' potential and fitting them into a neat little box from which they will never break free.' It is interesting to note that in 1981 the United Nations seemed to overlook the person-first trend when it proclaimed the International Year of Disabled Persons. Eventually someone must have asked, 'What's in a name?' because by 1992 the person-first principle was at last recognized when UN declared an International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

I am sure that we have not seen the last changes to terminology, but some recent descriptors seem to be bowing down a little too far to political correctness. For example, is it really helpful to refer to a person with a disability as 'differently abled'? And are gifted children with a reading problem really 'twice-exceptional'? One can be forgiven for asking, 'What on earth is in these names?'

Peter Westwood is a retired academic and teacher who now freelances as an education writer and editor. He is author of Commonsense methods for children with special educational needs (Routledge) and What teachers need to know about reading and writing difficulties (ACER Press).

References

Aggarwal, J.C. (2014). *The essentials of educational psychology* (3rd ed.) New Delhi: Vikas Publishing.

APA (American Psychiatric Association). (2013) *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed. DSM-5). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.

Binet, A. (1916). New methods for the diagnosis of the intellectual level of subnormals. In E.S. Kite (Trans.), *The development of intelligence in children*. Vineland, NJ: Publications of the Training School at Vineland.

Burt, C. (1937). *The backward child*. London: University of London Press.

Burt, C. (1953). T*he causes and treatment of backwardness* (2nd ed.). London: University of London Press.

Central Advisory Council for Education (England). (1967). *Children and their primary schools* (The Plowden Report). London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Cheshire Education Committee (1956). *The education of dull children at the primary stage*. London: University of London Press.

Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People (1978). *Special Educational Needs* (The Warnock Report). London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Department of Education/Department of Health [UK]. (2015). *Special educational needs and disabilities Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years*. UK Government Publications.

Farrell, M (2014). *Investigating the language of special education*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave-Macmillan.

Government of UK. (2014). *Children and Families Act 2014*. Retrieved from: *http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted*

Hinshelwood, J. (1917). *Congenital word-blindness*. London: H.K. Lewis.

Ingram, C.P., & Martens, E.H. (1935). *Education of the slow-learning child*. Yonkers-on-Hudson, NY: World Book Company.

Johnson, G.D. (1963). *Education for slow learners*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Kephart, N.C. (1960). *The slow learner in the classroom*. Columbus, OH: Merrill.

Kussmaul, A. (1877). Disturbances of speech. *Ziemssen's Cyclopedia* (pp. 581-875). New York: Wood.

McLeod. (1960). Educational backwardness: General and specific. *The Slow Learning Child, 7*(2), 100-111.

Orton, S. (1925). Wordblindness in school children. *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry, 14*(5), 285–516.

Rutter, M., & Yule, W. (1975). The concept of specific reading retardation. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 16*, 181-197.

Schonnel, F. (1948). *Backwardness in the basic subjects*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd.

Shields, T.E. (1909). *The making and the unmaking of a dullard*. Washington, DC: Catholic Education Press.

Snow, K. (2016). The case against "special needs". *Disability is Natural* website at: *www.disabilityisnatural.com/special-needs.html*

Tansley, A., & Gulliford, R. (1960). *The education of slow learning children*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Tobin, M. (2011). Put me first: The importance of person-first language. *Innovations and Perspectives* website. Retrieved from: *http://www.ttacnews.vcu.edu/2011/05/put-me-first-the-importance-of-person-first-language/*

Vasudevan A. (2017). Slow learners: Causes, problems and educational programmes. *International Journal of Applied Research, 3*(12), 308-313.

Vernon, M.D. (1957). *Backwardness in reading*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

A new name for LDA?

Members of LDA will be aware that the Association is currently considering a change of name.

One of the issues considered by the recent review of LDA was the option of seeking to expand its membership to a wider group of members, including classroom teachers, with a view to promoting effective evidence-based instruction for all students. In considering this option LDA identified the name of the organisation as a potentially limiting factor in the growth of our association. It was felt that our current name does not reflect LDA's broader aim of ensuring that all students have access to an effective instructional program that is preventative in terms of reducing the likelihood of learning difficulties that arise from poor or ineffective teaching, as for example in those cases that have been described as 'teaching casualties', in the sense that their problems result from ineffective teaching rather than any fundamental problem in their ability to learn, given appropriate instruction. It was felt that a new name that better expresses the broader aims of the association would attract more members and raise the profile of the organisation. Hence the search for a new name.

At the same time changing the name could alienate many of our current members who see themselves as committed to supporting the needs of students with learning difficulties, and feel that a change in name may bring with it a change in focus, and perhaps a rejection of their core commitment to meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties.

This poses something of a dilemma for LDA. In seeking to expand our membership to include a wider range of teachers whose role involves teaching initial skills in a regular classroom rather than providing intervention support in a small group or on a one-to-one basis, are we going to lose our core group of members? And is a change in name really going to attract a whole lot of new members to LDA?

A number of potential new names have already been suggested. These include *Australian Association for Effective Teaching, Australian Association for Effective Instruction, Learn Australia, The Learning League, Learning Science Australia, Learning Scientists Australia, Australian Science of Learning Association*, and others.

This is not the first time that LDA has gone through a name change.

It started off in Victoria in 1965 as the *Diagnostic and Remedial Teachers Association of Victoria*, but when it became a national organisation a new name was necessary, and in 1987 it became the *Australian Remedial Education Association*. However, in the 1990s, as the term 'remedial' fell into disfavour, the name was changed again to *Australian Resource Educators Association*. The name *Learning Difficulties Australia* was adopted in 2001.

So is it time for a new name for LDA? Or are we better off with our current name?

What attracts, and keeps, new members?

Is it a name? Or is it the quality and the nature of the services we provide?

This is a decision that our members will be asked to make at a Special General Meeting of the Association scheduled for Saturday 9 May in Melbourne. Further details of this meeting will be provided in due course. In the meantime members are encouraged to respond to President Lorraine Hammond's invitation for members to contribute alternative names to her by email at *enquiries@ldaustralia.org* prior to the next LDA Council meeting on 14 April, or to seek further information about the proposed change of name from her or other members of LDA Council.

Vale Anne Bishop
November 5, 1934 – July 20, 2019

Anne Pringle and **Mim Davidson** pay tribute to Anne Bishop, a former President of LDA who was a strong supporter of LDA's role in the provision of support for children with learning difficulties.

Anne Bishop joined LDA in the early 1970s, at the time that it was first established as the *Diagnostic and Remedial Teachers' Association of Victoria* (DRTAV), and was the President of the Association from 1976 to 1979 and again from 1989 to 1990. She was particularly interested in the provision of support to students with learning difficulties by trained specialist teachers, and instrumental in the establishment and running of the LDA referral service, which was set up to ensure that children from all schools had access to a trained specialist teacher in a school or practising privately.

As a trained occupational therapist Anne began her working career with child-psychiatrist Dr Brenda Ridley, who proposed that she enrol in a teacher training course. She contacted Chris Davidson, one of the founding members of LDA, early in 1971. Both she and Chris had attended Winton Junior School in Ballarat. Chris suggested to Anne that she enrol in the *Diagnostic Testing and Remedial Teaching* course founded by Fred Schonell, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Queensland. Prior to his appointment in Australia Fred Schonell had published his book *Backwardness in the Basic Subjects* in the UK, together with his wife Eleanor, a teacher involved with supporting the educational needs of polio victims, many of whom had missed out on schooling in their early years. Further publications followed.

The University of Queensland course was established to give experienced registered teachers, as well as other child focussed professionals, greater understanding of the educational needs of children with learning difficulties. It attracted experienced professionals working in the area of leaning difficulties from all states of Australia and overseas, including many of the founding members of DRTAV.

Anne successfully applied the knowledge gained in this course in her private practice as an occupational therapist and remedial teacher in South Yarra, a suburb of Melbourne, and was welcomed as a member of DRTAV of Victoria.

The *Diagnostic and Remedial Teachers Association of Victoria*, established in 1965, was initially formed of graduates from the University of Queensland course, many of whom were employed at private schools. Later, after the closure of the Queensland University course, specialist trained graduates from local courses, working in state and private special schools, were accepted in the association. This widened the scope of input into the association, which moved on to become the Australian Association of Remedial Educators (AREA), then the Australian Association of Resource Educators (also AREA) and finally Learning Difficulties Australia (LDA). Over this period the association grew in membership and its activities were extended to include the publication of a quarterly Journal as well as a regular Bulletin, and the provision of professional development for its members, including the organisation of a number of national conferences.

Anne included practical knowledge of horticulture from her studies at the Burnley Horticultural College Victoria in her teaching, and successfully gave her pupils an insight into the development of plants as well as the ability to observe the change in seasons, and possibly also the ability to read botanical names, which can be challenging to good and poor readers alike.

Anne and her Labrador and Red Setter dogs always welcomed clients, having travelled from near and far, at their appointed times. She was willing to discuss her observation of a child's needs with schools and suggest practical intervention to compliment teaching techniques.

Anne kept in touch with the original foundation group who established the *Diagnostic and Remedial Teachers' Association of Victoria*. She fought an incurable lung condition in her later life, which reduced her ability to carry on her practice. Her extended family, partner of many years, and firm friends, supported her during this time.

Anne expressed a wish to have her Celebration of Life in a garden and Burnley Horticultural College happily agreed to have it in their beautiful setting.

Vale Anne Bishop

Learning Difficulties Australia began life some 40 years ago when a small group of remedial teachers in Melbourne – mostly employed in independent schools – began meeting for informal discussions over coffee…

Many of these teachers had undertaken the certificate course in remedial education at the Schonell Special Education Centre at the University of Queensland.

Thus was born the Diagnostic and Remedial Teachers Association of Victoria, its broad aim to foster a professional image of teachers who worked with students with learning difficulties through a range of activities, including a consultancy referral service, lobbying of funding bodies, professional development and publications.

(From the LDA Bulletin, Volume 37, No 3, October 2005.)

Consultant Notes

From the Consultants Committee Convenor, **Ann Ryan**

What an eventful season we have had with bushfires, drought and torrential rains in the mid to the northern East Coast. As a rural dweller, I was amazed that this did not stop ninety people attending our most recent professional learning event in Melbourne, at Treacy Centre, on February 2nd. Bookings closed early as we had underestimated the interest in this home-grown presentation, delivered by LDA practitioners. The interest in our role is encouraging and we were delighted to be able to share a little of our daily work with others.

Much of the day was given to presenting many, but not all, of the commonly used assessment tools that we use in daily practice – some of which are free to download and use. Presenters delivered an overview of each, answering the what, the why and the how of each assessment tool. Many managed to take questions at the end of their presentation.

Perhaps the level of interest can be partly explained by the fact that we were not selling products, nor were we claiming expertise in the best and most recent assessment tools. The day was about sharing what we use to inform intervention plans and program monitoring. Lyn Franklin, of Westbourne Grammar School, and Sarah Asome, of Bentleigh West Primary School, also spoke about the types of screening tools used in their schools. Both schools were able to track student learning growth with remarkable outcomes at surprisingly low cost. The results are quite an extraordinary testament to the change schools can make in student learning when they have a clear understanding of current student knowledge and the information to plan for projected and ambitious paths of progress. As Sarah said, her school had moved beyond running records and found something much more effective on which to base instructional decisions.

Olivia Connelly unapologetically repeated the call for greater attention to fluency. The LDA Professional Development Committee may soon share exciting news about our next professional learning event which will be music to the ears of Olivia and many others. Olivia also reiterated many times the value of reading the manual of an assessment tool. I couldn't agree more that these manuals have a wealth of research-based information to enhance user understandings. Most assessments presented were standardized and normed.

During the second part of the day, Consultant Specialist Teacher Practice was discussed. Again, following the format of what, why and how, information was shared on running a private business, the advantages and disadvantages, and particularly the motivations and joys. Few consultant specialist teachers will make an average teacher's annual income, despite often long hours and jack-of-all-trades problem solving. We need to be master of our own finances, our technology, our policies and procedures, communications and promotions – although most now take bookings through the LDA Online Tutor Search. Many others rely on word of mouth, knowing that the demand for service is great. Others have closed their books to new clients and have long waiting lists. All are motivated by a passion to make a difference in the lives of students who have experienced struggle in the classroom.

We recognise the need to grow the numbers of LDA practitioners. While it is expected that LDA Consultant Specialist Teachers will always retain their status of reliable, experienced and well qualified professionals with post graduate qualifications in the field of learning difficulties, there is also recognition at Council level that we need to expand our numbers if we are to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties. Having said that, there is strong recognition in the words of Steven Capp, recipient of the 2019 LDA Bruce Wicking Award, that *'we need to work together to ensure that all practitioners cease to see intervention as being separate from good teaching'*. Research shows us that an evidence-based approach to classroom teaching can have a significant effect on the learning outcomes of all students, including those with specific learning needs. LDA Council, during this time of change and commitment to growth, are exploring ways in which we can respond to the need to expand the provision of interventionist practitioners to students with learning difficulties, to reduce the number of students needing specialist intervention support, and to do so by assisting classroom teachers to develop better understandings of the day to day evidence-based teaching practices that will meet the needs of all students, including those with additional needs.

Online delivery offers one way to expand our reach and participants on the day appreciated the presentation by Lisa Phillips who showed how this can be done. Congratulations to Juanita Lee who brought this professional development day to fruition. Her organisational skills were commented on and earned this feedback, *'Wonderful, informative day'*. And thank you to Meredith Davies for somehow managing to have the right slide showing at just the right moment. Finally, thank you to the many speakers who freely gave their time and were rightly recognised by the survey comment of '*Engaging, professional and knowledgeable'*.

The PowerPoint slides of the presentation are available through the Member's section of the LDA Website.

Finally, a reminder that we are always keen to hear from qualified people who may be thinking about joining our team. You can ring Elaine on 0406 388 091, email consultant.convenor@ldaustralia.org or contact Julie, enquiries@ldaustralia, phone 1300 756 206

Ann Ryan is the Convenor of the LDA Consultants Committee and Secretary of LDA. Email consultant.convenor@ldaustralia.org.

For details about the process and requirements for becoming an LDA Specialist Teacher Consultant, please refer to the website www.ldaustralia.org