

BULLETIN

Contents

- p2 Council Members
LDA Notices
- p3 Education in the news
- p4 Bring on the reading revolution: Janet Albrechtsen
- p5 LDA Seminar
- p6 The 2020 Summit – was it all worth it?: Jennifer Buckingham
- p7 Reading and the national curriculum: Margaret Cameron

Do children learn how to read by being read to?: Molly de Lemos
- p8 Can't read, can't write: Jo Rogers
- p9 A whole new language: Nick Maley
- p11 LDA AGM
- p12 Let's define 'learning disabilities' at last: Dr Nola Firth
- p13 Reading difficulties or dyslexia, learning difficulties or learning disabilities: Molly de Lemos
- p14 Book Review
Website Review
- p15 Consultants' Corner
LDA Activities

From the President

I would like to share with you my experiences at two recent conferences held in late March and early April in the United Kingdom. Apart from the cold and the new Terminal Five at Heathrow, everything went well. Would you believe we sat on the tarmac for two hours waiting for our luggage to be loaded? Even so, we were luckier than travellers on the same flight in the previous week, whose luggage ended up in Italy!

The first conference was held by the British Dyslexia Association in the very pretty town of Harrogate in Yorkshire. The theme of the conference was 'Dyslexia: Making Links'. I wasn't quite sure what 'Making Links' referred to but realised after Maggie Snowling's impressive keynote address that it was 'making links with the broader phenotype of Dyslexia'. Maggie argued that dyslexia should be viewed as a dimensional disorder without clear boundaries. Of great interest to me was the fact that 40 per cent of children diagnosed with ADHD have co-morbid reading impairments. This was explained by the fact that the temporal processing deficits in cases of dyslexia may be associated with ADHD. Other important points to emerge from Maggie's keynote were that multiple genes act to produce varying degrees

of dyslexia but good language acts as a protective factor, and a note of caution that 'genes do not cause dyslexia but do confer risks'. I think that this is

a crucial message in light of the research presented by the geneticists. Tom Nicholson reported on Dick Olsen's research in our last edition of the Bulletin stating that 70 per cent of reading problems are inherited and that the contribution from the environment is only 10 per cent. Dick Olsen also presented this data at the BDA Conference and whilst I cannot argue with the rigorous twin study data I do worry about the message that our teachers and parents are receiving. I prefer Maggie's message! I also agree with many of the excellent speakers at the conference who covered the importance of early language intervention. Our presentation was in this particular area – a paper entitled 'Language and phonological awareness intervention for at risk beginning



Continued on page 3...

LDA Mission Statement

Learning Difficulties Australia is an association dedicated to improving the performance of underachieving students through effective teaching practices based on scientific research both in the classroom and through individualised instruction.

For more details of LDA activities, professional development opportunities and for online access to the *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties* and *LDA Bulletin*, visit our website at www.ldaustralia.org



Membership of LDA Council 2007/2008

President

Ruth Fielding-Barnsley

President-Elect

Max Coltheart

Immediate Past President

Kevin Wheldall

Treasurer

Hugh McCusker

Secretary

Molly de Lemos

COUNCIL MEMBERS

Norina Buchanan

Margaret Cameron

Rosemary Carter

Ian Hay

Jan Heffernan

Alison Madelaine

Jan Roberts

Gary Woolley

Craig Wright

COMMITTEES AND CONVENORS

Executive/Management Group

Convenor: Ruth Fielding-Barnsley

Administration Committee

Convenor: Molly de Lemos

Publications Committee

Convenor: Kevin Wheldall

Consultants' Committee

Convenor: Rosemary Carter

PUBLICATIONS

Executive Editor: Kevin Wheldall

Journal Editors: Kevin Wheldall and

Alison Madelaine

Journal Associate Editor:

Ruth Fielding-Barnsley

Bulletin Editors: Molly de Lemos, Craig

Wright and Margaret Cameron

WEBSITE

Website Editor: Jan Heffernan

Webmaster: David Tehan

REFERRAL SERVICES

Referral Officer, Victoria: Elaine McLeish

Referral Officer, Queensland: Jan Heffernan

ADMINISTRATION

Administration Officer: Kerrie McMahon

LDA NOTICES

AGM and Seminar – Brisbane

LDA 2008 Annual General Meeting

Saturday 23 August 2008 at 1pm

Kelvin Grove Campus, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane
(see notice on page 11)

LDA Seminar

Saturday 23 August 2008 at 3pm

With speakers Dr Ruth Fielding Barnsley, Dr Louise Mercer and Professor Ian Hay. The seminar will follow the AGM.

Kelvin Grove Campus, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane
(see notice on page 5)

Professional Development Program – Victoria

Workshops for Consultants

Supporting the LD Student in Primary Maths: 'What's my style? Show me the tools for learning'

Saturday 16 August 2008, 10am to 1pm

Speaker: Mary Delahunty, experienced SPED lecturer

Venue: International House, 241 Royal Parade, Parkville, Melbourne

Helping with Student Stress and Depression

Sunday 5 October 2008, 10am to 1pm

Speaker: Jim Goodin, ex-teacher and Assistant Director Mental Health Foundation of Australia (Victoria)

Venue: International House, 241 Royal Parade, Parkville, Melbourne

Workshop fees

LDA members \$20; non-members \$40

Phone Rosemary Carter on 9435 8043 to book a place

Book early as space is limited.

Workshops for Teachers

ACER Resource Overview and Display: A brief presentation on new assessments and resources available from ACER

Wednesday 23 July 2008, 4:30 – 6:30pm

Presenter: Barbara Smith, Educational Consultant, ACER

Venue: ACER, 19 Prospect Hill Road, Camberwell

For members of LDA only, no charge. Bookings essential.

Email Molly de Lemos delemos@pacific.net for further information and a booking form.

Direct Instruction: Maximising learning through teacher-directed programs

Tuesday 5 August, 4:30 – 6:30pm

Presenter: Dr Rhonda Farkota, Senior Research Fellow, ACER

Venue: Hawthorn Campus, Melbourne University, 442 Auburn Road, Hawthorn

Fee: LDA members \$40; non-members \$50

Bookings essential.

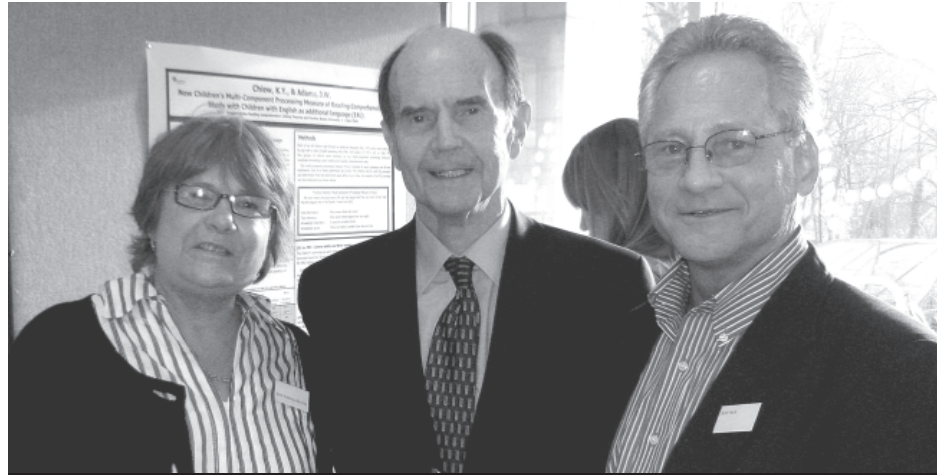
Email Molly de Lemos delemos@pacific.net for further information and booking form.

...continued from page 1

readers: First year results'. This paper was based on a study funded by an ARC grant to Hay, Fielding-Barnsley and Ashman.

Professor Dorothy Bishop from Oxford University tackled the issue of alternative intervention approaches bravely. Some comments which I noted relating to the Dore program were that there is "no evidence that motor training enhances the development of non-motor skills, such as reading", "why do some excellent sportspeople have dyslexia even when they have perfect balance", and even though there is a money back guarantee, this is only met if "there is no physiological gain, not reading".

There were so many excellent keynote speakers that it was difficult to leave the main hall to listen to other presentations. I did attend some interesting workshops on assessment – every test they used was from Australia, including the Neale and the South Australian Spelling Test! There were also some good workshops on



Ruth Fielding-Barnsley, Sir Jim Rose and Scott Paris at the University of Sussex

new computer software; Barbara Wise from the University of Colorado is a name to watch out for in this respect.

Sir Jim Rose reported on the Rose Review and I intend to cover this topic at the Seminar following this year's AGM on 23 August at the Kelvin Grove Campus of the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, so I do hope that you will be able to attend.

I will leave my report on the

'Reading Comprehension: Linking Theory and Practice' conference held at the University of Sussex at Brighton until I see you all in August. One item of interest to all of us is the development of a new oral reading test by the University of York team of researchers – I have a copy to share with you. Lots of carrots to tempt you!

*Ruth Fielding-Barnsley
President, LDA*

Education in the news

This issue of the *Bulletin* has picked up on a number of the issues that have come up for discussion in the media over the past few months. First there was Rudd's 'education revolution', which generated much discussion as to what was wrong with the current education system and how it might be improved. And then there was the April 2020 Summit, and although education did not figure prominently in the Summit agenda, some ideas and discussion relating to education did emerge.

Janet Albrechtsen's article in *The Australian* calling for a revolution in reading instruction, reprinted in this issue of the *Bulletin*, really got at the heart of the issues that need to be addressed in order to bring about a real revolution in education. This article supports the view that LDA has taken on the importance of initial reading instruction in preventing reading failure. This theme is picked up in Nick Maley's article 'A whole new language'. What is remarkable about Nick's article is that it is written by a non-specialist in education. But his common sense view shows a clear insight into the 'whole language' versus 'phonics' debate.

Among those who attended the 2020 Summit was Jennifer

Buckingham, previously education writer for *The Age* and currently a Research Fellow at the Centre for Independent Studies. In her article in this *Bulletin*, Jennifer reflects on her experiences in attending the Summit, and the processes that were involved in raising issues for discussion and identifying major goals in education. Prior to the Summit, individuals and groups were invited to make submissions to the Summit, and over 8000 submissions were received. The *Bulletin* includes three of these submissions, made by members of LDA.

Issues of definition and identification of students with learning disabilities, or learning difficulties, as well as how best to support such students, is an issue of ongoing concern to our members, and we hope that Nola Firth's article on this topic marks the beginning of an ongoing discussion of this important question.

Two reviews are included in this issue of the *Bulletin*. We would like to expand this feature of the *Bulletin*, and we encourage members who might be interested in contributing reviews of books, resources, or tests to contact us.

Your Bulletin Editors

Bring on the reading revolution

Janet Albrechtsen

If the steady stream of dismal statistics has numbed the national consciousness about indigenous educational failures, consider this.

In remote learning centres – note they are not even called schools – Mem Fox's picture book *Wombat Divine* was the only book used to teach literacy to indigenous children from Years 1 to 10 during the final term in 2005. As Helen Hughes, professor emerita at the Australian National University and a senior fellow at the Centre for Independent Studies, revealed in a paper released on Monday, indigenous students were taught to read by guessing whole words.

Is it any wonder that statistics tell us that pitifully few indigenous children learn how to read? Surely, then, an education revolution starts at the most basic level: when children learn to read.

As a Labor Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd is uniquely placed to bury some enduring myths about Aboriginal education in general and the teaching of reading in particular.

The comparisons and anecdotes in Hughes's paper tell a bleak story in a way statistics never can. The present generation of indigenous children is less literate than that of their grandparents, who attended missionary schools. Immigrants receive better instruction in English than indigenous children.

Is it any wonder that, as Hughes reports, "two bright, well-brought-up girls of 15 and 16 who had attended the Homeland Learning Centre where *Wombat Divine* had been a text for (Years) 9 and 10 respectively could not read *The Cat in the Hat*, write a paragraph describing their journey from East Arnhem Land to Sydney without assistance with almost every word, did not know when to use capital letters, thought there were 100 minutes in the hour, did not know how many weeks there are in a year, how

many grams in a kilogram, how to divide a piece of material in two or how to add, let alone subtract, numbers higher than 10".

None of this is accidental. It is the result of deliberate policies that gave primacy to culture above all else. Put it down to an indulgence by anthropologists wanting to freeze indigenous people in time so they could study them. Put it down to education bureaucrats who believed that a mainstream education did not suit indigenous children.

Make no mistake: as Hughes concludes, indigenous children have been the victims of educational apartheid. About the time that assimilation became a dirty word, indigenous education went into free-fall, dragged down by cultural imperatives that sidelined educational outcomes. Nowhere is that disaster better illustrated than in the teaching of reading.

If Rudd and Gillard are serious about an education revolution, let it begin in the classrooms of indigenous children. Let it begin by telling it like it is

Indigenous students are taught to read in a "culturally appropriate way". Apparently, culturally appropriate reading means exposing indigenous children to a pretty picture book about a wombat. Fox is a fine Australian author. Her books, such as *Wombat Divine*, have delighted thousands of children. She is a strong advocate that if a parent reads good books to their child, that child will learn to read. But reciting and reading are different skills.

It is here that Fox's influence as a vocal critic of phonics has not served children well. And it has proven disastrous for the most disadvantaged, those children without the luxury of a home full of books and parents who read to them.

Indigenous schools remain caught in the whole-word educational fad favoured by so-called progressive educators. For too long, those who control education in this country have derided phonics as the preferred reading method of conservatives. They treated the basic tool of teaching sounds that make up words as a throwback to the conservative 1950s.

Education luminaries such as Brian Cambourne said phonics was a tool to maintain prevailing power structures. The so-called progressive '70s could do better by students, they said. For Cambourne, literacy needed to be re-framed as a social movement that could be used to challenge the political status quo. Mundane tools such as learning the sounds that comprise the words on a page were dumped in favour of teaching students to think critically.

However, progress did not follow. It is difficult to think critically about a piece of writing if one cannot read fluently. Children are expected to memorise whole words, learn to read as if by osmosis, without knowing the basic building blocks. When learning basic skills was sidelined, children suffered. And disadvantaged children suffered the most. It is nothing short of reprehensible that our most

disadvantaged students are subjected to such illogical reading instruction.

Learning to read starts with the most basic of basics. Phonics teaches children the one-letter, two-letter and three-letter sounds that make up words. They learn how to read and how to solve problems by thinking logically. Confronted with a new word, a child trained in phonics will break it down into sound blocks. By building it back up with those sounds they can decipher the word. If working out how to read a new word is empowering for a four-year-old, it is critical for a 17-year-old.

Yet those schools that say they teach a balance of whole word and phonics have, in essence, sidelined any systematic teaching of phonics. How could it be otherwise given that teachers are themselves not taught how to teach phonics in any meaningful way?

The biggest hurdle to reform is ideology. The left-wing teachers' unions have become the latter-day

equivalent of the Maritime Union of Australia, blocking sensible reform at every step. Be it phonics or merit-based pay, a notion that most teachers support, or greater freedom for principals in the hiring and firing of teachers, unions have blocked reform, preferring a cushy status quo. And their so-called progressive barrackers in the universities that teach the teachers are with them all the way.

As the leader of a Labor Government, Rudd can make a difference to the next generation of indigenous children. The PM has a unique chance to tackle the critics in a way the Howard government never could. When the Howard government spoke of the importance of phonics, critics regarded it as some conservative conspiracy aimed at keeping people in their place and dulling their critical senses. It never made sense, of course. Critical faculties tend to improve most when people learn to read well and enjoy reading.

And just imagine if Julia Gillard, the 'education revolution' Minister from the Labor Party's left faction no less, chose to confront the ideological critics of phonics? If Rudd and Gillard are serious about an education revolution, let it begin in the classrooms of indigenous children. Let it begin by telling it like it is. Learning the sounds that make up words is not a politically driven agenda. It is about literacy. It is the key to social mobility. Until that small step is taken, indigenous children will continue to suffer.

Janet Albrechtsen writes a weekly column for The Australian, and is known for her independent views on a variety of topics. She has a doctorate in law, has practiced as a commercial lawyer, and has taught as an academic. This article was first published in The Australian on 9 April 2008, and is reprinted here with the permission of the author. Email: janeta@bigpond.net.au

LDA Seminar

Saturday, 23 August 2008

Kelvin Grove Campus,
Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane

3pm to 5pm

Following the LDA Annual General Meeting

PROGRAM

A Report on the 2008 British Dyslexia Conference
by Dr Ruth Fielding-Barnsley, President of LDA

The Communication, Language and Literacy Development Program resulting from the Rose Review
by Dr Louise Mercer, Lecturer, QUT and SPELD QLD Committee member.

Education Initiatives in Tasmania
by Professor Ian Hay, Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania

Alternative Remedies: Where are we heading?
A Panel Discussion of LDA Council Members, led by Dr Ruth Fielding-Barnsley

The 2020 Summit – was it all worth it?

Jennifer Buckingham, Research Fellow,
The Centre for Independent Studies

When Kevin Rudd announced the Australia 2020 Summit, my initial reaction was one of scepticism about the ability of such an event to generate outcomes of any substance. When I discovered that I was one of the lucky few to be invited, I decided that such an attitude was self-defeating and made a determined effort to approach the weekend with an open-mind and in a spirit of optimism.

I participated in the Productivity stream, a group of 100 people who were split up into four smaller groups. My group tackled the topics of Early Childhood and Schools. It was an excellent group, with a good range of perspectives. The person chosen to facilitate our discussion, Tony Mackay, did a great job. But the task was too big. There was some useful discussion and a lot of good thinking but the end result was disappointing.

I think that the ‘ideas’ agenda for the Summit was largely to blame. Good ideas cannot be created artificially out of thin air. Any idea that is generated in this way is likely to be untested and risky. Most of the important issues in education are ongoing ones that are yet to be properly resolved. For example, fair and adequate school funding, research-based teaching practice and evidence-based policy making, increasing the rigour of educational research, improving teacher quality and teacher training.

A better objective for the Summit would have been to seek some consensus among participants on the top three specific priorities for school education and to then ask participants for their thoughts on how to address them. Such an objective may have given a better framework for action.

What we ended up with instead was vague goal statements with few specific proposals. Some of these proposals were important, such as the need for better standards for educational research so that policy can be driven by evidence. However, they were lost in the attempt to put forward motherhood statements such as the need for

inclusiveness and lifelong learning. No one can argue with such goals, but the question of how to achieve them was neglected. Lack of time was an important factor.

Despite this, towards the end of the weekend I was still largely positive about the points we had agreed should be included in the final document to be presented to the entire Summit group. Unfortunately, what appeared in the final plenary session and was then published as the initial report did not accurately reflect our group’s resolutions.

This is not to say I regret attending the Summit or that I think it was not worthwhile. Despite the Summit’s flaws, I applaud the Australian Government for the initiative. It was a good experience, and created some connections between people who might now work together to achieve common goals. However, the demonstrable success of the Summit now rests on the participants acting on this opportunity.

*Jennifer Buckingham is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Independent Studies, and was previously education writer for The Australian. She was one of the 1000 delegates invited to attend the 2020 Summit in Canberra in April.
Email: jbuckingham@cis.org.au*

Good ideas cannot be created artificially out of thin air...

One big idea to emerge from the 2020 Summit

One of the big ideas to emerge from the Summit, according to one commentator (Misha Schubert in *The Age*) was Australian National University economist Andrew Leigh’s ‘innovative way’ to settle the long-running ideological wars over education methods: set up controlled trials – just as we do to test the effectiveness of new medicines.

According to Andrew Leigh: “Randomised trials are the gold standard in policy evaluation. Overseas randomised trials have taught us much about early childhood intervention, improving school attendance, job training, health insurance and neighbourhood spillovers. Yet Australia does very few randomised policy trials. To remedy this, the federal government should establish a fund to support states and territories in conducting randomised policy trials. Indigenous policies, education policies, and social policies ought not be driven by rhetoric and ideology, but by bold, persistent, experimentation. Policymakers should be more modest about the limits of their knowledge, and more rigorous in putting policies to the test.”

See Andrew Leigh’s website, at <http://andrewleigh.com/?p=1874>.

Reading and the national curriculum

Margaret Cameron's submission to the 2020 Summit, on behalf of LDA

In shaping a national curriculum for core subjects across Australia, it is vital that the issue of basic literacy skills be included, since all other school learning (including maths and science) depends on each individual's ability to read and write competently, whether in traditional print or electronic media.

The report of the National Inquiry into Literacy provides a valuable foundation for developing more effective reading programs for teaching children to read and write, as well as equipping their teachers to teach these basic skills.

A national curriculum does not need to mandate a particular brand of literacy program, as a range of effective approaches are already implemented in many schools. However, it would be possible to require schools to include the essential elements of a well-balanced program, which include explicit code-breaking skills, oral language, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, comprehension, and literacies of new technologies. Teachers also need updated training in these areas at both pre-service and in-service levels. One essential element that is often inadequately understood is a well-structured approach to phonics in the early stages of literacy learning.

Australia could follow the lead of initiatives following the UK's Rose Report. An excellent early literacy program was developed for use in schools to implement the findings of this inquiry. The materials produced are a valuable resource for teachers, and include detailed practical resources for incorporating systematic synthetic phonics as part of a well balanced program. It is significant that the literacy inquiries of Australia, UK and USA all came to similar conclusions regarding essentials for early literacy

learning, and it is time for Australia to ensure that best practice is implemented at the foundational stages of education.

Without greater proficiency in literacy, a significant proportion of the population faces a barrier to higher levels of education and training. Our national benchmark testing is showing that a significant proportion of our children are not achieving at the expected levels for literacy. While there are complex social and other reasons for children's failure, it is vital that intervention to assist these children is based on the best available practice. A close examination of materials prepared for such intervention in the Reading Assistance Voucher Scheme (2007) shows that these materials were based on a whole language approach, the very approach found to be ineffective for children with learning difficulties in many studies cited in Australia's National Inquiry. The next wave of intervention, An Even Start, has the opportunity to turn around the quality of intervention by using sound, evidence-based methods as a foundation to word recognition, fluency and comprehension skills. When developing these programs, organisations with experience in teaching children with learning difficulties (e.g. Learning Difficulties Australia; SPELD) could be invited to contribute more of their expertise. Such a change in approach would be far more likely to be successful, and a worthwhile investment in our country's young people, some of whom will be better equipped to advance in the key areas of maths and science.

Margaret Cameron is a member of LDA Council, and Senior Lecturer in Education at Tabor Adelaide. Her current passion is to pass on to student and practising teachers an understanding of effective literacy teaching, including phonics, in accordance with the recommendations of the National Inquiry. Email: mcameron@adelaide.tabor.edu.au

Do children learn how to read by being read to?

Molly de Lemos's submission to the 2020 Summit

One of the questions posed in the discussion paper produced for the Education, Skills and Productivity Agenda of the 2020, was "what can be done to reduce the wide variations in outcomes and school effectiveness?". The simple answer to this question is "teach children how to read".

The more complex answer to this question is "teach children how to read, using the most effective methods as demonstrated by the research evidence,

and focusing specifically on systematic instruction in synthetic phonics in the first year of school".

Being able to read and write is essential to further learning and critical thinking. Failure to achieve these basic skills in the early years of school has long-term negative effects on school achievement and subsequent life success.

Current methods used for teaching reading in our schools are based on ideology and assumptions that are unsupported by the research evidence.

Children do not learn to read by being read to. It is a complex process that has to be learned.

Some children pick it up relatively easily, given early exposure to a rich language background, and parents who not only read to them, but understand enough about the reading process to give them the clues that they need to pick up the link between the letters and the sounds.

Most children require specific teaching, particularly those from less advantaged backgrounds, and those whose parents are, for whatever reason, unable to give them help with their reading.

Those children who are most disadvantaged by current approaches to the teaching of reading in our schools are

Continued on page 8 ...

... continued from page 7

indigenous children, as has been clearly documented in the recent report by Helen Hughes on indigenous education in the Northern Territory.

It is not the role of parents to teach their children how to read, it is the role of schools. And failure to read should not be blamed on the parent, but on the school, and the ineffective methods of teaching reading in our schools.

In the US and the UK, major reports documenting the evidence relating to effective reading instruction have led to the adoption of systematic phonics-based

approaches to the teaching of reading in the early years of school. In Australia no action has been taken to implement the recommendations of the Australian National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, released in 2005. Instead, state governments have continued to support current ineffective teaching strategies based on the assumptions underlying the whole language approach to the teaching of reading.

As noted by Janet Albrechtson in an article in *The Australian* (9 April 2008), “the biggest hurdle to reform is ideology”. Similarly, Piers Akerman, in *The Sunday Times* (13 January 2008), called for

“educationalists who cling to peculiar beliefs that cannot be supported by readily available research” to be “challenged and removed from any positions they may hold which might give them control over school curricula”.

If there is to be an education revolution, let it start with teaching children how to read, quickly and effectively, in their first year of school. The rest will follow.

Molly de Lemos, currently the Honorary Secretary of LDA, is a retired psychologist and educational researcher, with a strong interest in the research on reading development and effective teaching of reading.

Can't read, can't write

Jo Rogers's submission to the 2020 Summit

Illiteracy (can't read, can't write – 30 per cent) and semi-illiteracy (can read, can't write – 40 per cent) is a huge problem in Australia that can be reversed by wise decision-making now.

The *Nelson Ministerial Enquiry into the Teaching of Reading in Australia* and the paper by Professor Max Coltheart and Professor Margot Prior on *Learning to Read in Australia*, published by the Australian Academy of Social Sciences, are essential reading.

This problem is caused by the adoption of the education ideologies, ‘whole language’ and ‘constructivism’ or ‘discovery learning’, imported from the United States into Australian teacher training and state education policies from 1975 to 1980.

These approaches are unsuitable for most children and have now been discredited by research studies in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand.

Primary children need to master basic literacy and numeracy skills by Year 3 in order to be able to build on that knowledge and to cope with the curriculum at late primary and secondary level.

Children who don't master these basic skills fall behind their peers, and

then develop low self esteem and social/emotional problems. Their worried parents become frustrated and angry.

Secondary teachers struggle to cope with class discipline, where disruptive students who can't read or write well enough to cope with the curriculum act up and undermine the learning of able students.

Australian business is negatively affected by illiteracy, and our English written language is brought into decline.

With each generation, these negative cyclic consequences increase further.

Education is fundamental to each individual and our health and wealth as a society. Have a think about the cause and effect of illiteracy in Australia – our rich and ‘lucky’ country – for some but not all.

It is no-one's fault – it is a system error. But it can be reversed within a generation if prudent decisions about education are made and implemented from now.

University teacher training courses need to be reformed to stop this cycle. Curriculum content of evidence-based explicit teaching of literacy and numeracy skills, and how to teach these skills to children, should comprise 50 per cent of the course content, and should be compulsory.

New teachers need to be well prepared to teach all primary students how to read, spell and calculate competently.

The National Curriculum can ‘fix’ this

problem by writing clear instructional course guidelines for teaching of literacy and numeracy skills in all primary classrooms, using evidence-based explicit teaching methods for two hours per day.

The ‘discovery learning’ approaches that are not suited to teaching literacy and numeracy skills can be used for creative subjects, three hours per day – this is a balance that will work.

The current primary curriculum is far too crowded for young children to cope with, and having to ‘learn’ a second language whilst being illiterate in their first language needs to stop.

The current national benchmark for Year 3 allows a child with Year 1 level reading skills to rate above the national benchmark, even though they are two years behind grade level.

Jo Rogers is a member of LDA, who is deeply concerned about the illiteracy and semi-illiteracy problem in Australia.

As a tutor of students with reading difficulties, with prior experience in primary teaching and special education, she is confronted daily with the effects of inadequate teaching of initial reading skills, leading to long-term reading problems. She has been active in her efforts to draw attention to these problems, and particularly the failure of teacher training institutions to adequately train teachers to teach children how to read.

Email: jandroggers@optusnet.com.au

A whole new language

Nick Maley

A highly politicised debate has been raging since the 1980s about the relative merits of 'whole language' versus 'phonics' in literacy teaching. Despite the best efforts of some to convince us that the debate is over, and that we are heading towards a synthesis embodying the best ideas from both sides, the debate is still very much alive.

It is a mystery why the debate should have become so politicised. What works best for young readers should be a scientific rather than a political question. This article is about looking at the debate from the scientific perspective.

For those new to the terminology, 'phonics' refers to an approach based on first teaching children the connections between the sounds of words and the way they are spelled. Modern phonics is a systematic development of traditional approaches which teach the child to sound out written words. This works because most English spelling is approximately phonetic.

Whole language methods were first developed in the 1970s, and started to become widespread in the 1980s. The essence of whole language is its treatment of the written language as a new language that can be learned by directly associating whole printed words with whole spoken words and their meanings. The original advocates of whole language in the 1960s and 1970s drew on the theories of the eminent American linguist Noam Chomsky. Chomsky argues that children are born with an innate knowledge of spoken language structures.

Millenia of human experience have shown that children do not need direct instruction to learn a new spoken language. What works best is immersion in a helpful, stimulating

environment where the new language is used constantly. The whole language movement thought that learning to read should be as natural a process as learning to speak. The key idea was that children would "construct" for themselves the knowledge they needed, given the right environment.

In its pure form, whole language completely bypasses systematic phonics instruction, working on the assumption that students will work out for themselves the phonic relationships between letters and sounds, if that is the way that particular student needs to construct his knowledge of written language.

The whole language approach also brought with it a rethink of the traditional teacher-student relationship, one that rejected rote learning in general. Phonics, based on mastering a set of sound-letter associations explained and reinforced by a teacher, was seen as an outdated teaching method. The whole language advocates linked up with a broader 'progressive' movement in education which questioned all teaching methods based on authority or repetition.

The movement has drawn its inspiration largely from big picture ideas in philosophy and linguistics, which are stated at a high level of abstract generality. That gives you considerable latitude for development of a program. And so it has turned out that, in practice, whole language utilises a number of techniques and there is a lot of emphasis on the creativity of individual teachers and students in developing personalised approaches. Some whole language supporters will recommend the use of phonics-style techniques embedded into a whole language program, whereas others reject phonics totally. They all seem to agree on one thing though; phonics should not be seen as the essential foundation. At best it is one technique among several.

By the mid 1990s, whole language

had supplanted phonics as standard practice in most schools in the English speaking world. As it did so, it started to attract criticism. A body of evidence was accumulating to indicate that despite increased resources and supposedly better teaching methods, the literacy performance of Australian schoolchildren was not getting any better, and was even, by some measures, getting worse. Similar concerns emerged in other English-speaking countries, including the USA, where the trend had started.

In Australia, things came to a head in 2004 following publication in *The Australian* of an open letter of concern from 21 academics, criticising the widespread use of whole language methods in Australian schools. This led to the then education minister commissioning an Inquiry in November 2004. The committee was chaired by Dr Ken Rowe from ACER, and included a number of eminent literacy researchers and practitioners.

Their brief was to consider the merits of whole language and phonics in literacy teaching. They reviewed and summarised relevant empirical evidence on literacy teaching from all over the world, placing extra weight on studies using randomised controlled trials.

The report was published in December 2005. It came straight to the point:

"The evidence is clear... that direct systematic instruction in phonics during the early years of schooling is an essential foundation for teaching children to read." (Executive Summary, p1.)

Turning to the question of whole language, the committee went on to say:

The Inquiry found strong evidence that a whole language approach to the teaching of reading on its own is not in the best interests of children,

Continued on page 10 ...

... continued from page 9

particularly those experiencing reading difficulties. Moreover, where there is unsystematic or no phonics instruction, children's literacy progress is significantly impeded, inhibiting their initial and subsequent growth in reading accuracy, fluency, writing, spelling and comprehension. (p. 2)

Rather than further describe the large body of empirical evidence referenced in the report to support these conclusions, we will look instead at learning to read from an information processing perspective.

Most researchers working from this perspective have concluded, like the Rowe Inquiry, that the whole language approach is more difficult for the child.

Why? Let's begin at the beginning.

Most children come to school at about the age of five or six already fluent in spoken English. They have already learned the associations between the sounds and the meanings of anything up to about 5,000 root words. That is about 5,000 'pieces' of information, where a piece of information is just the association between one sign (the sound of the spoken word) and another sign (the meaning of the root word).

This is an oversimplification of course. In reality there are many complexities. A single sound can have multiple meanings, and a single meaning can have multiple sounds, and as linguists and philosophers will tell you, meanings themselves are anything but simple. Nevertheless, this number of word-meaning associations gives a rough benchmark for the complexity of learning a new language.

Now consider a six-year-old learning to read English using a whole language approach.

The emphasis is on reading whole words in a meaningful context, so the child will not be drilled in the ways particular letter groups are typically pronounced. In some whole language programs, there will be an 'embedded' phonics component. This is an indirect approach to phonics

which will not usually occupy too much time, especially at the front end of the program. However, the front end is precisely where we should expect phonics to be most effective, as we will see.

As you would expect, students vary in the learning strategies they adopt. Some quickly pick up the rules relating letters and sounds by induction from examples. They start to do what whole language says they should: construct their own model of the relationships between letter groups, sounds, and meanings.

But not everyone does this easily. Struggling students may construct only a fragmentary phonics model or maybe even none at all. In these cases it could mean that in effect the student has to learn a whole new language – about 5,000 new pieces of information, as he is not making proper use of the information that written words in English have an internal structure which can be correlated with their

It is a sad irony that whole-language educators, while professing their concern for equity, are in practice limiting opportunities for some of the most disadvantaged.

phonetic structure.

It is possible to learn to read this way. There are countries where the written language is not phonetic, like China. Many children learn second languages at school. This shows that learning 5,000 new associations is not impossible for normal kids.

Not impossible, but nor is it easy. It is particularly hard for disadvantaged children.

Now consider a child learning to read using phonics. Here the idea is not to learn a whole new language, but to learn a relatively small number of rules which will allow the child to decode from an encoded form (written English) into its 'clear' form (spoken English).

First you have to learn to break down spoken English into its phonetic components. It is a matter for debate how many separately identifiable phonemes are used in English. The International Phonetic Alphabet identifies 107 basic sounds, most of which are not used in English. In fact it is usually assumed there are about 40 phonemes in American English.

These 40 phonemes then have to be associated with letters and letter groups. There are only 26 letters, but there are many commonly encountered letter groups which have quite distinctive pronunciation in English. Phonics programs usually assume up to about 120 commonly encountered letters or letter groups.

Learning these associations gets you only so far. Written English is basically phonetic, but the rules are very context dependent. Each letter group can have several different ways of being pronounced, and each sound can have different ways of being spelled, all depending on context. This increases the complexity of the task, meaning that the child may need to learn not just 120 new associations but maybe several hundred new associations. And on top of that, there are still individual exceptions which have to be learned as well.

That's not easy, but it's still a lot easier than learning 5,000 essentially unstructured and unrelated pieces of

information, which is the problem faced by some whole language learners.

Based on the information processing principles outlined above, phonics should help the beginning reader make more rapid initial progress than would be possible with whole language. The beginner has many fewer pieces of information to learn in order to make a probably correct translation of simple written English into spoken English. And because of the emphasis in phonics on a simple, standard method, we should expect it to have a higher success rate with disadvantaged students, provided of course that they have the basic letter and sound recognition abilities required to use the method.

This kind of analysis is not new, and is widely accepted by cognitive scientists who study language acquisition. It appears to be supported by the best available scientific evidence. Rigorous explications of an information processing model of phonics have recently been developed and tested experimentally by researchers.

This is why most people who study literacy from a cognitive science perspective conclude that phonics should be used as the foundation technique for beginning readers. Phonics gives them the quickest possible start, by leveraging all they already know about spoken English, and giving them some easily learned rules they can use to decode written English. And 'quick' wins bring the confidence that reading is something they can make progress on and eventually master. As any parent or teacher knows, confidence is a vital element with young children.

It also seems pretty clear that once reading is well established, motivated readers will start to outgrow the phonics based strategies that got them started in the first place. The 'decoding' method works, but it is too slow for experienced readers, who will soon start using whole word recognition anyway.

Therefore some elements of the whole language approach may be useful

in taking children with well established phonics skills to the next levels of achievement.

For all that, the clear conclusion, warranted by both theory and empirical evidence, is that phonics should be taught first, as the foundation technique. This is especially important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, provided of course they already speak English. There is evidence that it is precisely these children who have been most badly affected by the shift away from phonics during the 1980s and 1990s.

It is a sad irony that whole language educators, while professing their concern for equity, are in practice limiting opportunities for some of the most disadvantaged.

Nick Maley is a Sydney-based businessman. This article was first posted on Online Opinion on 22 February 2008, and is reprinted here with permission. Email: nmaley@bigpond.net.au.

Notice of LDA Annual General Meeting Saturday 23 August 2008

Kelvin Grove Campus, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane

The Annual General Meeting of Learning Difficulties Australia will take place in Brisbane on Saturday 23 August 2008 at the Kelvin Grove Campus, Queensland University of Technology, Victoria Park Road, Kelvin Grove.

The meeting, commencing at 1pm, will be preceded by a buffet lunch for members, from 12:30pm to 1pm, and will be followed by the LDA Award Presentations and a Seminar, to be presented by Dr Ruth Fielding-Barnsley, President of LDA and Dr Louise Mercer.

All members of LDA are invited to attend the lunch, the AGM and the Seminar.

For catering purposes, please advise if you will be attending the lunch prior to the AGM.

Phone Kerrie on 03 9890 6138 or email ldaquery@bigpond.net.au

Call for Nominations LDA Council 2008/2009

Nominations for the 2008/2009 LDA Council are now being called.

Information relating to the call for nominations and nomination forms are available on the website at www.ldaustralia.org

The closing date for nominations is Friday 18 July 2008.

Let's define 'learning disabilities' at last

Dr Nola Firth

THE recent finding by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal over a lack of appropriate support for student Rebekah Turner

indicates the serious shortcomings in understanding and support for learning disabilities in Australia.

Now in Year 11 at Ringwood Secondary College, Rebekah was awarded \$80,000 in a discrimination case against the Education Department. The Tribunal found she had been inadequately supported for her severe language disorder and learning disabilities.

Those to whom this article refers, including Rebekah Turner, may not be able to read it. About 10 per cent of people have learning disabilities (sometimes called dyslexia). Compared with the US and Britain – and, more recently, New Zealand – learning disabilities have been ignored in Australia. The consequences are that these students are at risk of developing behavioural problems at school – of school dropout, mental health problems and delinquency. Policy and practice in Australia need to change to incorporate the significant knowledge now available to help this group.

In the UK and the US, the term 'learning disabilities' is officially defined and is a part of policy and educational discourse and practice. In these countries, there are many schools established specifically to cater for the needs of these students, and in the UK many government schools have been awarded 'dyslexia-friendly' status by the British Dyslexia Association.

In contrast, government inquiries in Australia and New Zealand in the 1970s argued against the existence of learning disabilities as a phenomenon intrinsic to the child. The genetic nature of the phenomenon that is now being indicated suggests that the US and UK decisions were accurate. Indeed, last year the New Zealand Ministry of Education finally recognised the need to take account of the particular needs of this group. Australia has yet to do so.

Because a shared definition of learning disabilities is not a part of Australian

educational discourse, many teachers and parents are unaware of its genetic and permanent nature. In particular they are frequently unaware that learning disabilities are highly resistant even to skilled intervention.

This includes the teaching of reading by phonic methods, which relies on the ability to analyse sounds, a processing skill that is very difficult for many students who have learning disabilities. Consequently, governments and the media frequently focus on literacy problems and assume these are due to inadequate pedagogy. At least to some extent they are likely to be due to learning disabilities.

It is also possible for Australian teachers to complete their training without being informed about learning disabilities and how to cater for the needs of these students. There is instead widespread confusion among Australian teachers over the terms 'learning difficulties' and 'learning disabilities'.

The terms are used interchangeably to refer to disparate groups of students, such as those who have intellectual disabilities, those who speak English as a second language, or those who have specific literacy skill difficulties despite their average to high ability in other areas.

This lack of precise information can result in teachers feeling they have failed their students, and push them to pursue yet another reading method as the way to achieve higher reading and spelling accuracy.

Lack of definition also precludes diagnosis. It is possible in Australia for students to progress through some schools without an accurate diagnosis that explains the difficulties faced by them and their teachers and that provides a basis for effective support.

This situation has been justified by a reluctance to apply negative labels to students. However, many who have learning disabilities recall being labelled – and labelling themselves – as stupid or lazy. Self-awareness and understanding, and taking control of the situation, are critical factors in achieving success for those with learning disabilities. Diagnosis is

the first step in this process.

Finally, with such poor understanding of the phenomenon, there is little funding in Australian schools for programs targeted at learning disabilities. Knowledge of effective ways to cater for these students is available.

It includes explicit teaching of targeted strategies, opportunity for revision, and use by teachers and students of mediums other than print. Furthermore, there is a need to teach these students to deal proactively with their circumstances. It is now known that the way students deal with their learning disabilities has more influence on their life outcomes than the learning disabilities themselves.

Successful students and adults who have learning disabilities take charge of their lives, find compensatory strategies, persevere, and call on supportive parents and teachers.

At the Centre for Adolescent Health, in association with the education and paediatric departments of the University of Melbourne and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, we are researching the best ways to implement school-based programs that teach such adaptive coping.

For now, however, students with learning disabilities are at risk of giving up, withdrawing socially or becoming disruptive in class.

Recognition of the problem and adequate funding for diagnosis and school support is urgently needed. A nationally agreed definition of learning disabilities, its compulsory study in teacher training, and at least one teacher with advanced specialist knowledge in each school would be an excellent beginning.

Such support would prevent the economic and social costs that occur when students are not given the opportunity to develop their potential. It would help students such as Rebekah to succeed.

Dr Nola Firth is a research fellow at the Centre for Adolescent Health, Department of Paediatrics, University of Melbourne, and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute. This article first appeared in The Education Age on 25 February 2008, and is reprinted here with the permission of the author. Email: nola.firth@mcri.edu.au

Reading difficulties or dyslexia, learning difficulties or learning disabilities

Molly de Lemos

There is widespread confusion regarding the distinction between the terms 'dyslexia' and 'reading difficulty', and the terms 'learning difficulty' and 'learning disability'. To some, these terms are seen as meaning much the same thing, and are interchangeable. To others, they denote a difference in both the degree of difficulty and the underlying cause of the difficulty.

The terms dyslexia and learning disability are usually seen as denoting a condition which is due to some form of neural dysfunction which is genetic in origin, persistent, and resistant to treatment or intervention. The need to distinguish this specific group from other students with more general reading difficulties or learning difficulties is largely related to funding. There is a perception that students with a label of 'dyslexia' or 'learning disability' are, or should be, eligible for special funding or resources, while those students who do not carry this label are not.

Up until the 1980s, the term 'learning difficulty' was the term most commonly used in Australia to describe students who experienced difficulties in learning. A further distinction was generally made between students described as having a 'general learning difficulty' in all areas of learning, and those described as having a 'specific learning difficulty', usually in reading or maths. However, there has been a shift in the use of these terms, with an increasing use of the term learning disability in preference to the term learning difficulty. This shift coincided with the movement towards integration or mainstreaming in the 1980s, and particularly the use of the term learning disability in the United States and the UK to denote a particular category of students who were eligible for funding under their respective special education provisions. The subsequent adoption of this term in

Australia seemed to be associated with a belief that using the term 'disability' in preference to the term 'difficulty' would strengthen the case for students with learning difficulties to be included in the Commonwealth definition of students with a disability, who are eligible for special funding through the Commonwealth special education program. However, this has not happened.

The term dyslexia has not been widely used in Australia, and in fact was generally avoided because of the problems of definition, as indicated by Joe Elliott in his article in the last issue of the Bulletin (March 2008). Nevertheless, the increasing use of this term in the UK and also in New Zealand, particularly to raise awareness of the particular problems experienced by students with reading difficulties and to seek support for these students, is likely to have an impact on the use of this term in Australia.

Calls for greater support for students with learning difficulties are welcome. However, it is to be hoped that this does not get bogged down in issues of definition, identification, and diagnosis.

While it may be possible to make a conceptual distinction between categories of students according to whether their learning difficulty is related to intrinsic factors (neural processing factors that are genetic in origin), as compared with students whose learning difficulties are related to extrinsic facts (home background and schooling factors), in reality there is no easy way to make this distinction except by monitoring students' progress when exposed to effective intervention programs in their specific areas of difficulty.

Rather than spending time and resources on developing nationally agreed definitions of learning disabilities, and elaborate diagnostic programs to distinguish between students whose disability, or difficulty, is related to intrinsic rather than extrinsic factors, why not simply establish effective programs of support for all students who

are experiencing difficulties in learning, using a simple procedure based on nationally consistent cut-off scores on standardised measures of achievement.

Procedures for identifying students who require additional support would not be difficult to establish, and are in fact common practice in some schools, particularly in the private sector, who routinely administer standardised tests of reading and maths tests for internal monitoring purposes.

And to avoid confusion in terms, why not stick to the terms traditionally used in Australia to define students with learning difficulties.

Let us stick to the term reading difficulty in preference to dyslexia, and the term learning difficulty in preference to learning disability.

This way, we all know what we are talking about, and can focus on ensuring that students with learning difficulties are provided with the support they need, regardless of either the severity or the cause of their learning difficulty.

For some students, the support required to overcome their problems and to enable them to participate effectively in the normal classroom may be relatively brief exposure to intensive catch-up programs of intervention. Other students may require intensive long-term help to support their learning problems.

But providing appropriate support for every student with a learning difficulty, according to their specific needs rather than to the source of the difficulty, is surely the most effective and equitable way to go.

Molly de Lemos is a member of LDA Council and a former researcher with the Australian Council for Educational Research. She was the author of the report Schooling for Students with Disabilities, published in 1994, which reported the results of a project investigating educational provisions for students with disabilities, funded by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training.

Book Review

Soundasaurus

Vivienne Gyopar

Published by Where4Kids, 2006

Reviewed by Margaret Cameron.

Soundasaurus is a different approach to the personal spelling dictionary used in many junior primary classrooms. It aims to overcome the problems of alphabetically listed dictionary use, where a child may not be able to locate a word because of the many spelling choices available for a sound – for example, where would a child find a word starting with the ‘k’ sound – under k, c, qu, ch?

In *Soundasaurus*, the selected word bank of frequently used words lists words not only by the beginning sound, but also under other significant sounds in the word. An example is the word ‘school’ which is listed not only under ‘s’, but also under ‘ch’ on the ‘k’ page, and ‘oo’.

Pages in *Soundasaurus* are arranged in sound–spelling groups. The common (and sometimes uncommon) spellings of the 47 identified speech sounds are displayed together, with at least one key word, plus other high frequency words, listed, and space for children to add to the word list with their own words. Incorporated into each page are homophones which use alternative spellings for words that sound the same, marked with an asterisk to alert the student to compare the alternatives, and

look up a standard dictionary if necessary for meanings. Spelling hints and mnemonics are given at the bottom of some pages to help children learn commonly misspelled words.

Soundasaurus would be a valuable tool for junior primary teachers who are already teaching a systematic phonics program which includes alternative ways of representing speech sounds. It fills the same need as the conventional personal dictionary, but with greater emphasis on the application of phonemic awareness to find words or ‘have a go’ at working them out, then recording the correct spelling for later reference. Its purpose is to provide a resource to support the application of phonics skills for young writers; it is not in itself a ‘phonics program’. Students would need to be taught how to use the well laid out index pages to locate the sound page for a particular word; this process provides valuable practical reinforcement and application of phonic skills, and supplementary resources are available. Using *Soundasaurus* could become a regular feature of activities in the spelling and writing programs of junior primary (and Learning Support) classrooms, with a much more appealing title than ‘Your Personal Word Bank’.

Soundasaurus can be purchased directly from the publisher for \$18.95 + p&p (at time of writing) along with other support materials, as listed on the website: www.where4kids.com.au

Margaret Cameron is Senior Lecturer in Education, Tabor Adelaide. Email: mcameron@adelaide.tabor.edu.au

Website Review

The Standards Site: UK Department of Children, Schools and Families website on Phonics, at

www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/phonics

Reviewed by Margaret Cameron

A brief review can hardly do justice to the wealth of quality information available on this website, which has been developed in response to the recommendations of the Rose Review of Early Reading – Britain’s national inquiry into the teaching of literacy. Like our own National Inquiry, the findings pointed clearly to the advantages of teaching systematic phonics as the necessary foundation of literacy skills.

On the website you will find links to the Rose Review itself, to core criteria for choosing or evaluating a phonics product, and numerous resources for their own phonics program, ‘Letters and Sounds’. Whilst many published programs have

similar detailed information on scope, sequence and teaching materials, this one has the distinctive feature of free online video clips of effective phonics lessons, using real teachers with their own classes. The sample lessons range from basic phonemic awareness for beginners to basic spelling strategies for children in their second or third year of school. These are a powerful resource for beginning teachers, or for teachers wanting to find fresh approaches or improvements to their early literacy teaching. From the videos, teachers can see how children are involved interactively, what materials are used and how the children respond. For Australian viewers/listeners, some of the phonic sounds are very different (e.g. ‘u’ sounds the same in ‘put’ and ‘duck’) but the teaching principles apply regardless of accent. Resources used include such simple basics as plastic letters and mini-whiteboards, but also technology such as

interactive whiteboards.

As part of the information on choosing a phonics product, the site presents a self-assessment proforma for published phonics programs. Publishers are invited to contribute a self-assessment of their product to the site, and among the many who have responded are Jolly Learning, Letterland, THRASS, and their own Primary National Strategy, ‘Letters and Sounds’. The criteria given would be a valuable starting point for any program’s self-evaluation, whether it is a commercial package or a teacher’s own classroom phonics program.

Take the time to browse through the site and its links, especially the video clips of effective teaching. At the very least, they will provide you with fresh ideas or reassurance in the task of teaching children to read and write effectively.

Margaret Cameron is Senior Lecturer in Education at Tabor Adelaide. Email: mcameron@adelaide.tabor.edu.au

Consultants' Corner

Greetings to all LDA Consultants in every state at the beginning of chilly winter – although while Victorians are basking in days resembling sunny autumn, they are really longing for rain. Regardless of the weather, it is time to turn our minds to the topic of insurance. Some Consultants have voiced their concerns that the policies taken out in previous years have not covered them comprehensively. This has prompted an investigation, which is currently in hand. Inevitably this will delay the procedure and may result in an increase in costs. Consultants should be aware that when the 'application for LDA insurance' is returned, a cheque for \$50 as deposit must accompany it. This has been necessitated because this year a few applicants withdrew after LDA had paid the premiums.

The Government has again introduced a package to replace the \$700 Voucher Scheme.

An Even Start is now available to consultants Australia-wide, but will operate for 2008 only. Those wishing to participate must first register with the Private Tuition Coordinator, phone 1300 363 079, or visit the website at www.anevenstart.dest.gov.au. Those who have read Margaret Cameron's competent analysis of the Reading Assistance Program in the last issue of the *Bulletin* will agree with the suggestion that attention to the teaching of synthetic phonics should be an important component of the new tutoring program.

Report from Victorian Referral Officer.

There is no report from the Victorian Referral Officer in this Bulletin, as Elaine is currently overseas in Dubai. She will be back in mid-June, so you can expect a report in the next issue of the *Bulletin*.

LDA Activities

This year our AGM will be held in Brisbane, on 23 August. We hope that it will be well attended, particularly by our Queensland members. It will be followed by a seminar led by our President, Ruth Fielding-Barnsley, who will be giving a report on the recent British Dyslexia Conference she attended, as well as the Conference on Reading Comprehension: Linking Theory and Practice, at the University of Sussex, in early April. Other presenters at this seminar will be Dr Louise Mercer, who will be talking about the Communication, Language and Literacy Development Program resulting from the Rose Review, and Professor Ian Hay, who will be giving an overview of recent education initiatives in Tasmania. Professor Hay, a member of LDA Council, has recently taken up the position of Dean of the Faculty of

Education at the University of Tasmania. The seminar will conclude with a Panel Discussion on the topic of 'Alternative Remedies: Where are we heading?'

Our professional development program in Victoria has been expanded this year to include workshops directed more specifically to our teacher members. Workshops in this new series include the workshop on phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency presented by Maureen Pollard and Helen Kirkland in May, with further workshops coming up in July and August (see page 2 for details). The series of workshops in South Australia initiated last year by Margaret Cameron is continuing this year, with a second workshop by Barbara Nielsen on the epidemiological approach to assessing learning difficulties presented in May. We hope that in the future such workshops

While updating my LDA Consultant database, it is obvious that only a few Consultants have notified me of the expiry date of their Police Check or Working with Children Card.

As mentioned in the last *Bulletin*, it is a commitment which must be made if you are registered with the Referral Service. From the calls I am receiving while Elaine is away, the Referral Service is still the popular choice of parents needing extra help for struggling students. By the time you read this, however, Elaine will have returned from sunny Dubai.

All LDA members who are primary teachers in Victoria should note that the professional development maths presentation that was to have been given by Mary Delahunty on 15 June has now been deferred to Saturday 16 August. Mary was unable to present in June as she was overseas, but fortunately Chris Killey was able to fill in with a presentation on mathematical games. Thanks to Chris for filling in at the last moment. Early bookings for Mary's workshop in August have already been received, so please book early if you are intending to come to this session. Booking is essential.

I wish all Consultants fulfillment in whatever enterprise is engaging them at the moment.

Rosemary Carter
Convenor, Consultants' Committee
Email: orcarter@bigpond.com

might be extended to other states.

As members are aware, our *Journal* is now being produced and distributed by international journal publishers, Taylor and Francis. The last issue for 2007, Volume 12, No 2, was produced in-house, and distributed in April, and we expect the first issue of the 2008 volume to come out shortly. Your LDA membership will continue to cover your subscription to the *Journal*. However, we have decided to move from a financial year subscription to a calendar year subscription, to bring our subscription year in line with that of the *Journal*. Members will receive further information about this change when they receive their subscription renewal notices in late June.

We look forward to your continued support of LDA activities, and welcome your feedback and comments.

Contacts

Learning Difficulties Australia



PO Box 349
Carlton South Vic 3053

Phone: (03) 9890 6138
Fax: (03) 9890 6138
Email: ldaqery@bigpond.net.au
www.ldaustralia.org

ABN: 26 615 758 577
Reg: AOO13706L. ISSN: 1321 - 3369

LDA Office and General Enquiries:
Kerrie McMahon Ph/Fax: (03) 9890 6138

Consultant Enquiries:
Rosemary Carter Ph: (03) 8344 5361

Referral Service, Victoria:
Elaine McLeish Ph: (03) 9482 1031

Referral Service, Queensland:
Jan Heffernan Ph: (07) 3871 0728

Deadline for copy next
issue of *LDA BULLETIN*:
15 August 2008

EDITOR: Molly de Lemos
Email: deleemos@pacific.net.au

BOOK REVIEW EDITOR: Margaret
Cameron
Email: MCameron@adelaide.tabor.edu.au

TEST REVIEW EDITOR: Craig Wright
Email: craig@understandingminds.com.au

Articles and advertising in the *Bulletin* do not
necessarily reflect the opinions or carry the
endorsement of the Association.

Membership Application Form 2008

- Network with other professionals in the field of learning difficulties
- Receive regular publications
- Participate in workshops, seminars, and conferences
- Become an LDA Consultant

Membership is for the period 1 January to 31 December 2008

Pro rata membership subscriptions are not available. The annual membership fee entitles members to four issues of the Bulletin and two issues of the Journal for the calendar year. Back issues are supplied to members joining during the year.

Name _____ Title _____
(Individual membership)

Organisation _____
(Institutional membership)

Type of organisation _____
(Indicate whether school, or if other institution, please describe nature of institution)

Name of contact person _____
(Institutional membership)

Address _____

Email _____

Tel _____ Mobile _____

Degree/Qualification _____
(Individual membership)

Current Occupation/Area of Interest _____
(Individual membership)

Membership Categories

Member \$93.50 Consultant Member \$148.50 (subject to accreditation)

Student Member \$49.50 (student ID required) Institutional Member (includes schools) \$165.00

Please find my cheque attached for \$ _____

Payments by EFT can be made to:

BSB: 063 238 Acc. No: 1000 1271 Account Name: Learning Difficulties Australia

When using EFT please include your name in the transfer information fields, and send completed application form to LDA by mail, fax or email, giving date and reference of EFT payment.

or

Charge my Bankcard VISA Mastercard

Card No Expiry ____ / ____ / ____

Name on Card _____

Signature _____ Date ____ / ____ / ____

Please tick if a receipt is required

Send to LDA Subscriptions, PO Box 349, Carlton South Vic 3053 Fax: (03) 9890 6138 Email: ldaqery@bigpond.net.au