

Achieving whole-school
learning support p. 14

War and Peace in reading: Jim
Rose proposes a truce p. 17

The history of Direct
Instruction research p. 22

Nomanis

Reading | Teaching | Learning | Connecting

Issue 5 July 2018



WHY WE SHOULD
EMBRACE THE YEAR ONE
PHONICS CHECK TRIAL

InitialLit-1 coming soon

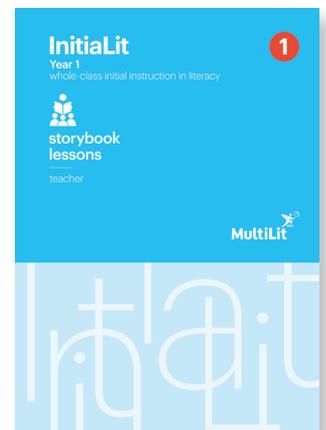
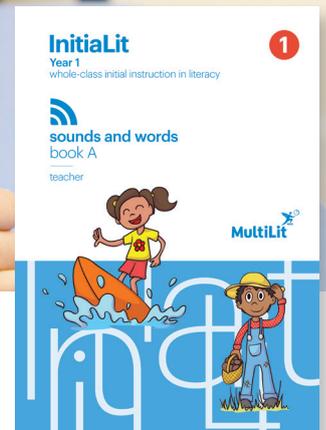
InitialLit is a three-year program for whole-class instruction in initial literacy. In November 2018, MultiLit will release InitialLit-1.

InitialLit-1, a continuation from InitialLit-Foundation released in 2017, provides an explicit and effective model for teaching reading, spelling and related skills to children in their second year of schooling.

The program incorporates daily lessons in phonemic awareness and synthetic phonics, as well as rich language instruction using children's literature. As with InitialLit-Foundation, a set of decodable readers, InitialLit Readers (Levels 10-16), have been developed to align with the InitialLit-1 instructional sequence. These readers, used alongside the program, help students generalise and consolidate their skills.

What is in the program?

- 131 detailed and scripted lessons to be delivered to the whole class
- Flashcards, Picture Cards, Templates and additional downloadable resources necessary for the delivery of a full lesson
- MS PowerPoint lessons to accompany the script for ease of delivery
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- Storybook Lessons based on 25 popular storybooks to develop and enhance vocabulary and oral language as well as encourage a love of literature
- A set of colourful posters designed to reinforce common spelling and grammar terminology and concepts
- Testing and monitoring procedures to assist with the identification of children who may need extra assistance



**To register your interest in receiving more information about InitialLit-1,
email multilit@multilit.com**



10



27

8

South Australia's trial of England's Year One phonics check: why we need it

Jennifer Buckingham and Kevin Wheldall

10

We can do better than Reading Recovery

John Kenny

12

We should not get rid of the term dyslexia

Linda Siegel

14

Achieving whole-school support for students with learning difficulties: 10 things to consider

Robyn Wheldall

17

War and Peace in reading: how about a truce?

Jim Rose

20

A frank truth: All instruction guides and supports implicit learning

Steve Dysktra

22

The long history of Direct Instruction research: Part 1

Kerry Hempenstall

27

How well prepared are Australian preservice teachers to teach early reading?

Lin Meeks

29

Introducing the Institute of Special Educators

4

Editorial: Herding cats – Reflections on conducting randomised control trials in schools

Kevin Wheldall

6

What we've been reading

Reading | Teaching | Learning | Connecting

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Herding cats: Reflections on conducting randomised control trials in schools



Kevin Wheldall

When I was an undergraduate student of psychology in the late '60s, carrying out true experiments seemed relatively straightforward, according to our lectures and textbooks. One allocated the rats, for example, to different treatments and it was relatively simple to keep all other environmental variables constant. Even when we carried out experiments ourselves with human subjects, randomly allocating undergraduate students (the most studied group in all of psychology) to different treatment conditions was not a major issue and they too shared quite similar environments on the whole. What we could not directly control (for example, by ensuring that equal numbers of males and females were present in each group), we relied on careful randomisation of participants to conditions/treatments to avoid, or at least minimise, other potential influences, by ensuring that any possible differences among participants were just as likely to be present in one group as in the other.

When I graduated, I soon learned from bitter experience that research with human subjects was rarely as straightforward as it might initially have appeared. Nevertheless, I remained (and, indeed, still remain) as committed to truly experimental research as the gold standard. In the very first issue of the journal, *Educational Psychology: An international journal of experimental educational psychology* in 1981, Richard Riding and I (as the two newly appointed, founding joint-editors) proclaimed proudly in our editorial article our determination to promote a truly experimental approach to research in educational psychology. That this was easier said than done rapidly became increasingly apparent: not much truly experimental research was being conducted, it was largely correlational. While there has been some progress in this regard, it remains broadly as true today as it was then. In his 2009 book, *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-analyses Relating to Achievement*, John Hattie commented:

“Some have argued that the only legitimate support for causal claims can come from randomized control trials (RCTs, i.e. trials in which subjects are allocated to an experimental or a control group according to a strictly random procedure). There are few such studies among the many outlined in this book ...”

And the reason, of course, was that so few true experiments were being carried out in educational contexts. This is because such research is very difficult to carry out in schools. By way of illustration, I offer two ‘war stories’, highlighting some of the problems and difficulties typically encountered when attempting to carry out randomised control trials (RCTs) in schools.

The disappearing control group

In the early 1990s, I jointly led a research team commissioned by the NSW Department of Education to evaluate the efficacy of Reading Recovery. After considerable debate, I was able to convince both the Department and our research team that a truly experimental evaluation was essential. To this end, a study was designed in which Year 1 students who were struggling to learn to read were randomly allocated to one of three conditions/groups from schools where Reading Recovery was operating. Equal numbers of young students



were allocated to one of three groups: an experimental group of young struggling readers who received Reading Recovery for 15 weeks; and a first and a second control group of struggling readers who received 'business as usual'; whatever remedial help was typically available in the school other than Reading Recovery. (A comparable 'comparison' group from different schools in which Reading Recovery was not operating was also recruited.)

We had thought ourselves smart, if not prescient, to include two control groups because we knew that once students had completed Reading Recovery, they would need to be replaced with fresh students for instruction by the Reading Recovery teachers. To this end, teachers were asked to recruit replacement students from the second control group but to leave the first control group strictly untouched. After 15 weeks, students in the experimental and the first control group were assessed and their performance on a battery of measures compared. All was well; the groups remained intact and fair comparisons could be made.

The idea was also to test for maintenance of gains and to retest students after a further 15 weeks of regular instruction following their exit from Reading Recovery. It was at this point that we realised that we had not been nearly as clever as we had thought. The teachers had recruited fresh students from the second control group, as requested, but once this source had been exhausted they then went on to recruit further fresh students from the first (real)

control group. Consequently, our control group at 30 weeks was sorely depleted; not only this but it appeared that it was the weakest students from the control group who had been taken into Reading Recovery. This meant that the control group was not only smaller than desired but also far less representative than it had been initially. This made comparisons difficult and our findings at 30 weeks were thus subject to caveats. Fortunately, the comparison group comprising students from schools not receiving Reading Recovery was shown to be very similar to the experimental group at pre-test and hence comparisons between this group's performance at 30 weeks and that of the experimental (Reading Recovery) group could be made. But this evidence was far weaker than that from a true experimental comparison, as had originally been planned.

Were these teachers evil? Determined to wreck our research? No, not at all. They were simply doing their job which was to help as many struggling Year 1 students as possible.

The reluctant recruit

In a more recent study with which I am familiar, an independent research team was contracted to evaluate the efficacy of another remedial reading program with a strong emphasis on phonics. Schools were invited to take part but the decision to accept was taken by principals and not by the individual teachers who would be involved. Teachers who were to provide the novel program were carefully trained in exactly how to deliver the program. In order to ensure that this

training had been effective and that the teachers were delivering the program as designed, all teachers were subsequently observed and their performance rated according to their compliance with the various key aspects of program delivery. This is known as treatment fidelity (sometimes called treatment integrity). Clearly, if measured treatment fidelity is low, then any evaluation of the program's efficacy will be invalid. If the program is not being taught properly, it is unlikely to be effective.

Treatment fidelity is typically expressed as a percentage of the number of critical components being reliably implemented by the teacher. In this study, one teacher was observed to have a treatment fidelity rating of 5-10%; she was not following the requirement of the program for over 90% of the time! To state the obvious, it is simply not possible to tell whether the program is effective or not if it is not being delivered properly most of the time. This teacher had been heard to observe that she simply could not bring herself to ask a child to "sound it out".

Was this teacher evil? Was she determined to wreck the research? No, not at all. She was simply doing her job which was to teach reading as well as she knew how. Unfortunately, her inclusion in an 'intention to treat' analysis has the potential to seriously compromise the findings of the study unless appropriate steps are taken to mitigate the effects.

*Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM
Joint Editor*

What we've been reading

At MultiLit, we are not only interested in teaching reading but we are also avid readers ourselves. In this regular feature, we ask members of the editorial team what they've been reading recently and to share their thoughts with our readers.



Sarah Arakelian

I had previously enjoyed reading, on recommendation from a friend, *The Philosopher and the Wolf* by Mark Rowlands and, in similar vein, I have recently read *What the Dog Knows* by Cat Warren. While both books deal with the harder aspects of life, both are lovely accounts of our relationships with our furry friends. I have also very much enjoyed *The Christmas Mystery*, written by Jostein Gaarder and translated by Elizabeth Rokkan and, more for laughs than inspiration, *100,000 Baby Names* by Bruce Lansky.

As a team, we have also been following Timothy Shanahan in many of his recent posts on his blog, *Shanahan on Literacy*.



Alison Madelaine

My recent reading has included *Into the Water* by Paula Hawkins, *The Chalk Man* by C.J. Tudor, *Stella and Margie* by Glenna Thomsom, *The Woman in the Window* by A.J. Finn, *The Lesser Bohemians* by Eimear McBride, and *The Monkey's Mask* by Dorothy Porter.

While I am not normally a big reader of biographies, I did read *Unbreakable* by Jelena Dokic. This was very good, although some of the content was difficult to read. Two books I did not enjoy and therefore did not finish were *4321* by Paul Auster and *That Deadman Dance* by Kim Scott. On a more positive note, I have been reading the Geronimo Stilton series to my six-year-old son. These are quite fun and he enjoys all of the made-up words like 'fabumouse'.



Meree Reynolds

My current bedtime reading is *A Gentleman in Moscow* by Amor Towles, historical fiction set in the period from the 1920s to the 1950s. I am enjoying this uplifting story that revolves around a remarkably resilient aristocrat who is held under house arrest in a hotel throughout years of great change in Russia.

Other books that I have read recently are *The Yellow House*, a debut Australian novel by Emily O'Grady and *The Woman in the Window*, a thriller by A.J. Finn. I found both books very compelling with many twists and turns in the plots that kept me up turning the pages late at night.



Kevin Wheldall

In his latest offering in a series of 'diet' books, Dr Michael Moseley offers us *The Clever Guts Diet*, as an easy to read summary of current thinking on the role of the gut in our lives. We are repeatedly told that there are as many neurones in our gut as in the brain of a cat (which might explain the peculiar growls and yowls sometimes emanating from my abdomen) and that the gut regulates appetite, the immune system and, not least, mood. All very well until you get to the ghastly recipes appended when it becomes clear that this approach is clearly intended for those who do not really like food.

My abiding interest in the Pre-Raphaelites and the Arts and Crafts movement has been fed by two books of late: William Gaunt's classic text *The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy* (in a beautiful Folio Books edition) and a new novel by the celebrated Australian author, Kate Forsyth, *Beauty in Thorns*. It is always dangerous to find out too much about one's heroes and my uneasiness about Dante Gabriel Rossetti has now become a suspicious dislike. My fondness for William Morris, however, warts and all, remains intact.

I have also re-read Agatha Christie's *And Then There None*, again in a handsome Folio edition (no, they don't pay me). Almost



unbelievably, to modern ears, it was originally published in the UK in 1939 as *Ten Little Niggers* and later as *Ten Little Indians* (i.e. native Americans or First Peoples), hardly an improvement. Regarded as Christie's masterpiece, it has not stood the test of time. Crime fiction enthusiasts expect rather more depth of characterisation and social commentary these days.

Two short story collections, both published posthumously, *Sleep No More*, by P. D. James, and *A Spot of Folly*, by Ruth Rendell, serve to remind us of our great loss, not only to crime fiction but also to serious fiction period, following the deaths of these two grandes dames of the literary world in recent years.

I am enjoying biographies more these days and have recently read *Evelyn Waugh: A life revisited* by Phillip Eade. After reading this, any baby boomer claiming to be a wild child of the late '60s might have pause for thought as to whether their antics were really quite so, well, wild and certainly not so very new and different. Waugh himself comes across as a complex character, his biographer struggling bravely to convince us that he was not quite as obnoxious as is commonly believed. Reading this biography prompted me to read (re-read?) Waugh's famous novel, *Vile Bodies*. Suffice to say that Waugh seemed incapable of writing anything less than pitch perfect prose while at the same time treating the reader to a master class in humorous writing.



Robyn Wheldall

Having long had a fascination with the Pre-Raphaelites and also as a great admirer of the work of William Morris, I was excited to read the novel *Beauty in Thorns* by Australian author Kate Forsyth. The novel deals with the turbulent personal lives of the artists William Morris, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Jane Morris, including the affair that influenced all of their lives. I loved this book. It was at times difficult to read in terms of the turmoil and agony suffered by the trio. But I was pleased that by the end of the book, I still liked and admired William Morris, who seems to have been a thoroughly nice man.

Other recent titles I've read include *News of the World: a novel* by Paulette Jiles. Essentially a western, it is a great and quirky read set in the post-Civil War period in Texas. The book details the unlikely relationship between a former military man – now curator and reader of the news of the world for local audiences at public readings – and a young white girl who had been 'rescued' from native Americans after living among them for several years. Her experiences with the Kiowa people shaped her in enduring ways. The book itself is a beautiful artefact; a small paperback that is a pleasure to hold and feel. Joanna Trollope's *An Unsuitable Match* entertained but fails to live up to her previous much-loved titles. Trollope has an acute sense of people and relationship dynamics and communicates them so well. This means that she is always an engaging read but this one left me a little disappointed.

The book I have just finished reading is the journalist James Jeffrey's autobiographical *My Family and Other Animus*. One of those books that I didn't want to end, it is a collection of recollections and reflections of his family life. Jeffrey tackles some pretty difficult stuff, including family breakdown, but does so in such a way that his love for his family – both of origin and of creation – is clear and enriching. Beautifully written, it is a book that made me laugh out loud but also made me cry.

South Australia's trial of England's Year One phonics check: why we need it

**Jennifer
Buckingham**



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 last year. The results allay many of the reservations about the check and confirm the need for its introduction.

**Kevin
Wheldall**



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

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.

The headline data on student performance shows that the majority of children in both Reception (the first 'foundation year' of school) and Year One found the test items difficult. The average number of correctly read items was 11 out of 40 for Reception students and 22 out of 40 for Year One.

Given that the phonics check is designed for students in Year One, it was expected that Reception students would score low. This confirms the wisdom of the SA Department of Education and Child Development's decision to expand the trial from the original design (Reception only) to include Year One. But the Year One performance was also low relative to their counterparts in England and the expectations of their teachers.

According to the 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 distribution of scores in SA 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% achieve the threshold score.

In England, student performance is reported against a 'threshold score' of 32

out of 40. For the past two years, 81% of Year One students in England achieved this score. A far lower percentage of children in the SA trial achieved at this level, estimated to be about 30%.

Four ways South Australia's phonics check was different

The phonics check trial in SA employed exactly the same word items used in England in 2016. 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 sample.** In SA, the group of 4406 students in 56 schools who participated in the trial was from a self-selected sample of schools who volunteered. In England, all schools are required to administer the check annually. So, the SA sample may not be truly representative of the state as a whole, let alone of students Australia-wide.
- 2 **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.
- 3 **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 the SA trial, the check was 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.
- 4 **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 the stopping rule was not consistently applied. It's unlikely many children failing three items in

succession would be able to achieve the threshold score of 32 items out of 40. A stop rule is not part of the standard conditions used in England, although teachers do stop children if they are struggling. As many as 41% have been found to do this.

Students liked it

Teachers and leaders in the trial reported that all students responded positively, including struggling readers, and 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".

Teachers and school leaders were overwhelmingly positive

The feedback from teachers and school leaders 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 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 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.

The SA trial of the Year One phonics check has been an important initiative. The evaluation report will be a valuable guide to changes that need to be made for a state-wide implementation. Even more significantly, the trial has provided strong support for implementation of the Year One phonics check across Australia or, at the very least, for other states and territories to conduct similar trials. It supports the findings of the expert panel for the Australian government, 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.

Notes

- 1 Jennifer Buckingham and Kevin Wheldall provided independent advice to the South Australian government on the design of the trial of the Phonics Screening Check. They had no direct or indirect involvement in its implementation or evaluation.
- 2 This article is an updated version of a similar article that first appeared in *The Conversation*.

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We can do better than Reading Recovery

**John
Kenny**



Reading Recovery (RR) is a short-term tutoring intervention that provides one-on-one tutoring to first-grade students who are struggling in reading and writing. It has been a popular program, but it is now [on the way out in New South Wales](#). The NSW Department of Education decided to axe its \$50 million dollar funding of the program following its own [internal review](#).

NSW's internal review was not the first time RR has been red-flagged. New Zealand academics [have mentioned](#) that the research into the effectiveness of the program in New Zealand isn't doing RR any favours. Distinguished literacy expert, Louisa Moats, on a [recent visit](#) to Australia even went so far as to say the program is 'harmful'. She commented, "The whole [Reading Recovery] approach is based on ideas that have not held up to scientific scrutiny. So it is indefensible to keep on spending money on this."

Yes, there have been some red flags for a while, but now that the decision has been made, was it the right one? I say yes.

Reading Recovery is theoretically flawed

RR uses a well-known model called the Three Cueing System. Students are meant to draw on three cues – syntactic, semantic and graphophonic – to decode and make meaning from text. The Three Cueing System has a [shady past](#) and reminds me of Kenneth Goodman's long-discredited [Psycholinguistic Guessing Game](#).

Both ideas share the understanding that students draw on contextual clues to decode text and that the use of phonological information does not play a significant role. For many years in the 20th century, rhetoric and intuition reigned because decisive evidence on the issue of how students come to read was hard to obtain. However, this is 2018 and there most certainly is evidence. Research has converged on the same conclusion: phonological information is an essential element in skilled reading and impairments in the use of phonological information are typical of poor readers. It is now known that good readers do not rely on context to decode text; they rely on precise and detailed attention to letters and words. Guessing informed by syntactic and semantic cues is used by poor readers to compensate for their poor decoding ability ([Seidenberg, 2017](#)).

Knowing that the use of context is characteristic of poor readers, we must ask why we would support a program that encourages students to use it.

Reading Recovery support was always based on flawed research evidence

It is true that RR has research evidence in its favour ([examples](#)), but the evidence oft presented is flawed. From what I have seen, the studies never actually pin the intervention against any other plausible intervention designed to increase



reading achievement. Instead, most of the studies evaluate its effectiveness against doing nothing. Even if RR is flawed in its design, doing something is better than nothing, especially on a one-to-one basis. [In this paper](#), Benjamin Bloom describes the profound effect a one-to-one intervention has on achievement. Given that a child in a one-to-one intervention has the exact same time for instruction as peers in a normal classroom scenario, the child in the one-to-one intervention will learn significantly more than their peers (in one study cited, it was 2 standard deviations). This tutoring effect has a lot to do with the fact students in one-to-one environments are much more likely to stay engaged in the task, and the corrective feedback they receive is tailored perfectly and given at the perfect time.

So, even if RR is flawed, students are of course still going to benefit from it in the short term – it is better than doing nothing!

There are better alternatives

If we would like to measure the effectiveness of RR, perhaps we should compare its effect to other one-to-one interventions for struggling readers such as a high-quality systematic synthetic phonics program. Indeed, we now have [three national inquiries](#) into the

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teaching of reading that explicitly state that systematic phonics is an absolutely essential part of learning to read. The conclusions of the three inquiries are informed by the large body of evidence showing that the use of phonological information is an essential element in skilled reading. Because RR is designed to help students who are struggling readers, it is worth noting that those students presenting with reading difficulties overwhelmingly have problems with English's deep alphabetic code; they have trouble matching the sounds of the language to the letters that represent these sounds in writing and vice versa. To help our struggling 6-year-olds, it seems completely logical to implement programs that target this problem. These programs do exist and they are a much better alternative.

We can do so much better than Reading Recovery. It was time for the program to go.

*John Kenny has been a Kindergarten teacher in an inner Sydney public school. He writes regularly on reading instruction and other education topics through his blog. Connect with him on Twitter: [@johnkenny03](#)
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We should not get rid of the term dyslexia

Linda Siegel



The proposed solution of getting rid of the term dyslexia is like using a machete to slice a lemon. The problem is not the word dyslexia. Reading and other learning disabilities are a serious problem for society. Dyslexia and other learning disabilities are not being properly recognised and treated in our educational system. These learning disabilities cost society a great deal, not just in money but in social and emotional problems. Antisocial behaviour (as in prison populations and juvenile detention centres), homelessness, drug addiction, suicide and emotional difficulties are often a result of dyslexia and other learning disabilities that have not been properly identified and/or treated. These social, emotional, and educational costs can be significantly reduced if we identify and treat the problem of reading difficulty.

We do not differentiate between dyslexia and a reading disability. They are one and the same and involve difficulties with reading. Whatever you call it, difficulties with reading are a problem for our society. However, abandoning the term dyslexia will not solve the serious challenges that the field faces.

- 1 Dyslexia (reading disability) is defined as a severe difficulty with accuracy and/or fluency or reading words and/or pseudowords. There may also be difficulties with spelling, writing, and reading comprehension. Note that I did NOT include spelling in the definition, as there are many individuals who are good readers and poor spellers. If we advocate for this definition, then it will remove much of the definitional chaos. Of course, it does not deal with the continuum and cut-off issue but at least it is a step forward.
- 2 The discrepancy definition, that is, using a large difference between IQ scores and reading achievement as a definition of dyslexia, should be abandoned. We have ample evidence that individuals with reading problems and high IQ scores (the discrepancy definition) do not differ from individuals with reading difficulties whose IQ scores are not significantly higher than their reading scores. In addition, IQ scores do not predict the ability to benefit from remediation. This issue is a real one; many jurisdictions still use the discrepancy definition and require an IQ test, which is unnecessary.
- 3 Considering the definition of dyslexia, all that is strictly necessary are measures of accuracy and fluency of word and pseudoword reading. Measures of reading comprehension, spelling, arithmetic calculation and mathematical problem solving may be helpful. Measures of cognitive processes do not contribute to the definition and are not necessary for appropriate interventions.



- 4 There is an undemocratic and inequitable distribution of resources in regard to individuals experiencing reading problems. Extensive psychological testing is expensive and not affordable for many families. Yet individuals are denied access to interventions and accommodations without this testing. Appropriate assessments should be used as described in #3. Many public schools do not provide appropriate resources for children with reading difficulties. Parents who can afford it send their children with reading difficulties to private – usually expensive – schools.
- 5 Classroom instruction in reading is often woefully inadequate. Teachers need to be trained in appropriate interventions, including but not limited to, phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, syntactic, morphological and orthographic awareness.
- 6 Assessments to identify children at risk for reading problems need to be instituted. Measures of phonological awareness and letter naming are essential.
- 7 Intervention for reading difficulties is too little and too late. Children at risk for reading difficulties are not identified at a young age and are not provided with interventions that

We have ample evidence that individuals with reading problems and high IQ scores do not differ from individuals with reading difficulties whose IQ scores are not significantly higher than their reading scores.

would reduce the likelihood of later reading difficulties. In fact, students with reading difficulties at any level are not properly identified. Adults with reading problems cannot get assessments of, and interventions for, their difficulties because of the costs and the lack of availability.

- 8 An RTI model should be widely used. The essential components of this model are frequent monitoring of progress and intervention provided as soon as it is necessary.

Merely getting rid of the term dyslexia without addressing these problems will not solve the serious issues that society faces in regard to individuals with reading problems.

Why keep the term dyslexia? It is familiar and comforting to people. That is not a reason in itself but it is a consideration. From my point of view, it is important to deal with the basic issues that I have outlined above without arguing about the term dyslexia or trying to invent some other term.

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Achieving whole-school support for students with learning difficulties: 10 things to consider

Robyn Wheldall



Providing support to children who struggle to learn at the same rate as their peers is a perennial and challenging problem for schools. It is clear that some children will take longer to master the basic skills required for higher order learning and teachers have to accommodate the learning needs of these students as well as others who are progressing at a more typical rate. This is hard to do in a class of students but a coherent whole-school approach can help ensure that all (or the vast majority of) children are being provided with the support that they need in school.

There are some guiding principles that can help schools deliver the support required, summarised below as the 10 Cs.

- 1 **Conviction:** The first prerequisite for an effective whole-school approach is the belief or conviction that all children can learn. We need to resist the temptation to rush to identify ‘within child’ problems as the reason for learning difficulties. Obviously, there are some children who have endogenous conditions that make learning more difficult but there are many more children who are struggling who do not. Difficulties may arise that have more to do with the environment that the child is in rather than some characteristic of the learner. Similarly, we should be cautious about explaining a child’s difficulties by aspects of their home environment or background. While what goes on at home can be an important factor in a child’s learning journey, we don’t have control of the home environments of children who struggle. But we do have control over what occurs at school. And what occurs at school can be powerful indeed. We are wise to bear in mind that familiar idiom, “If the student hasn’t learned, the teacher hasn’t taught.” In other words, the buck stops with us.
- 2 **Champion:** Appointing a champion for a cause is an important part of leadership. This has to come ‘from the top’. The Principal must drive a whole-school approach by nominating an effective learning support champion. In addition, the Principal must commit to having adequate time and resources dedicated to learning support across the school. As in any venture that we undertake in the school system, the need for a committed school leadership is absolutely essential. Principals and their executive need to make sure that adequate resources are made available and that learning support is a priority for the school.
- 3 **Commitment:** Time and resources (human and material) have to be committed to learning support if it is to be successful. Providing a child with a weekly half-hour or hour-long session of learning support is just not going to do it. Frequent instruction (and repeated exposure) is required for most students who have learning difficulties. Managing resources is a key element in making sure that the right support is delivered in the right



'dosage' for a successful whole-school approach. While it is tempting to try to offer support to as many children as possible at any one time, it is important to limit the size of small groups in Tier 2 interventions. Having more than four students in a group may limit the effectiveness of the intervention. It is also important to provide a lot of resources (if needed) early on so that problems can be nipped in the bud with a bit of targeted intervention. Don't wait for the problem to resolve itself. Go in early and go in hard. Spreading precious resources too thinly is just a waste of both time and effort.

- 4 **Competence:** Providing time and personnel to deliver learning support is not sufficient either. Staff members providing support need to be using evidence-based approaches. What and how it is taught really matters. A person with relevant special education qualifications should be responsible for the programs of all children receiving learning support across the school. This is not to say that all the delivery has to be done by special educators. Well trained and monitored paraprofessionals can be highly effective in delivering targeted learning support. The need for competent delivery is critical to successful intervention for learning difficulties.
- 5 **Consistency:** Learning support should not occur in a vacuum. What is taught in learning support sessions should not be substantively different to what is taught in the classroom. For instance, if a student is being taught to blend and segment words in learning support using synthetic

phonics, then the same approach should be evident in the classroom. It is cruel to teach a child one way in one context, and then have them try to achieve in another using different skills. More broadly, learning support should be seen as part of a continuum of all learning that is taking place in the school. The Response to Intervention framework helps us to conceptualise how this looks, with students moving in and out of increasingly intensive tiers of instruction depending on their need of support.

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- 6 **Check-ups:** Monitoring student progress is a critical part of providing the right kind of support to students with learning difficulties. Identifying students who require support early is the best way of keeping the task manageable. A little bit of support early in a child's schooling can save a lot of grief (and expense) down the track. It really is not too early to be identifying children who can receive Tier 2 (typically small group) intervention towards the end of the first year of school. How children respond to intervention needs to be continually measured and monitored so that decisions can be made about the effectiveness of the intervention for that child – do they need to move into a more intensive tier, for example. Data-based decision-making is a critical feature of effective learning support. And data needs to be kept in a systematic way and passed on to the person teaching the child in the following year. Precious time can be lost when the learning support clock gets reset every calendar year.
- 7 **Communication:** It is an obvious point but still worth making that good communication between the learning support team and the classroom teacher is very important. Learning support should not be seen as something that occurs somewhere else and therefore is not relevant to what is going on in the classroom. The best outcomes will be achieved where the classroom teacher is kept updated about the progress the student is making and how developing skills may be reinforced

and practised in the classroom. Apart from the obvious benefits of more practice, being able to put skills to use in another context will assist with generalisation, which can be an issue with children with learning difficulties. Moreover, a two-way conversation is important so that the classroom teacher and the learning support team can share insights and plan for the student effectively. Time for these discussions should be timetabled (and resourced) so that they happen as a matter of course, not by chance.

- 8 **Cooperation:** Flowing on from communication, it's clear that there has to be a high level of cooperation between the classroom teacher and the learning support team. Each needs to support the other in their work with the child, and also with the parents. An integrated and seamless form of support will give confidence to the child and their parents, an important element in keeping things positive. It can be very confronting for parents to learn that their child is not progressing as well as they would hope. Providing professional and caring support in this situation is very important. Agreeing on how the child's difficulties are conveyed can reduce any confusion and adds confidence that there is timely and appropriate support for the child. Remember that although you may have seen many children with learning difficulties, for a parent this may well be a first in their experience.
- 9 **Continuity:** For some children, the need for learning support will be ongoing. Hopefully, with evidence-based Tier 1 whole class instruction and with effective Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, the number of children requiring longer term help will be reduced. But there will be some whose needs change over time and require help in other areas. For instance, a child who struggled with decoding early on may master that only to face problems with writing down the track. We need to ensure that we can provide continuity of support to meet the child at their point of need. And we need to

persist; we need to model persistence and not give up. Some children need a lot more support to arrive at the same end point as their peers. This is not failing, it's just a longer and slower (and harder) journey. Our students need to understand the importance of persistence as it likely that this will be a skill that they will need to take with them past school and into their adult life, if they are to succeed.

- 10 **Celebration:** It is easy to feel despairing at times when learning is slow and laborious. But we must look for opportunities to celebrate genuine progress. Obviously, this needs to be done sensitively so that a student is not embarrassed by their relative achievements. But sustained effort, persistence and achievement should be acknowledged and celebrated. In addition, we should be seeking to find the things that the student excels at so that these can be celebrated too. Experiencing difficulties with learning can be very challenging and can lead to problems of self-confidence. We need to look at the whole child and

An integrated and seamless form of support will give confidence to the child and their parents – an important element in keeping things positive

watch for signs of disengagement, school refusal, sadness and poor self-esteem. If these features are evident, the intervention approach should be stepped up to take account of this.

When considering if your school is doing all it can to optimise the learning opportunities for students who have difficulties learning, ask yourself:

- Do I (and those around me) have a conviction that all children can learn?
- Does my school have a champion in terms of providing effective learning support?
- Is there a real commitment of time and resources for meeting the needs of children with learning difficulties in our school?
- Are the people who are providing learning support using evidence-based approaches? Are they trained? Are they monitored if they are not qualified special educators?
- Do we check on the progress of students regularly to make sure no one is falling through the cracks? Do we check to see if interventions are being effective?
- Do we have open and effective communication between classroom teachers and the learning support team? Is there a high level of cooperation between these people?
- Do we provide ongoing support for a student's learning difficulties even though they may manifest differently over time?
- Do we celebrate the effort, achievements and strengths of our students with learning difficulties to keep them engaged?

If you can answer yes to all these questions, you are probably doing a great job in your school at supporting students with learning difficulties. Congratulations!

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War and Peace in reading: how about a truce?

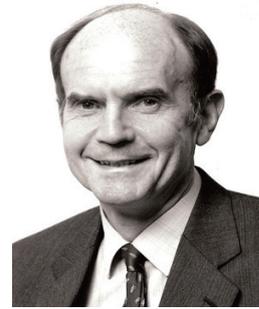
Some children we teach imprint indelible memories. One such was Raymond. He was a ‘blitz of a boy’ fashioned in the mould of Charles Causley’s Timothy Winters. For him, school was not always a pretty sight. During a story writing lesson, he asked: “Sir, how do you spell peace?” I said, “Do you mean as in a piece of pie, Raymond?” He said, “No. I mean like when ‘me’ dad says: turn that bloody telly off and let’s have a bit of peace.” This was almost 60 years ago when I was a ‘rookie’ primary teacher and Raymond was one of 40 children in my class of nine-year-olds.

While much has changed markedly for the better in primary education over the years it seems that peace has yet to break out over how best to teach young children to read and write. In the never-ending ‘Reading Wars’, the noise of battle is sometimes akin to those repetitious adverts on the ‘telly’ that numb the brain: once described by a teacher colleague as ‘stereophonic porridge – cold, grey and coming at you from all directions’. For hardworking, dedicated primary teachers, much of this debate must come over as a Tower of Babel, especially when they look to research for help only to find that it, too, often points in opposite directions.

On the face of it, two recent papers, seem to be another attempt to stir the porridge in Australia and in England. The first, by Greg Brooks, argues forcibly that Australia should resist the temptation to introduce a version of England’s Phonics Screening Check (PSC)¹. The second is one of a brigade of papers in a recent book edited by Margaret Clark², a long-standing critic of the Reading Review (Rose 2006), who seems to be mired in an unreconstructed, Plowdenist view of primary education.

Australia is debating the value of a Phonic Screening Check for their schools and is wisely drawing upon rich seams of national and international academic expertise and professional practice to inform their decisions. This paper focuses upon Clark’s book and the paper by Brooks in the case of England. In passing, however, it is perhaps worth saying that the PSC is turning out to be an exceptional initiative in England, not least by providing a very strong incentive for schools and teachers to verify their judgements and keep children’s progress in phonics under review.

Among the many confusions in Clark’s book is an assumption that high-quality phonic work, designed to secure children’s ability to decode words, is somehow at odds with children’s acquisition of ‘meaning’, that is to say, understanding what they read. It stems from a failure of Clark et al. to recognise one of the most well-developed constructs that has driven much valuable research in this territory in recent years, notably the Simple View of Reading, first proposed by Gough and Tunmer in 1986. This considerable weakness in the discourse of Clark’s book deserves far more attention than can be given in this



**Jim
Rose**

paper. For those wishing to delve further, one of the best explorations of this territory is provided by David Kilpatrick³. For example, he writes:

“... what stands between most students and the meaning of a passage are the actual words in that passage. If children cannot read the words, they cannot comprehend the passage. So, if a systematic phonics approach results in superior word reading it should also result in superior reading comprehension” (Nation, 2005).

Since it was published, I have spent much time reminding critics, first, about the remit of our 2006 Review and, secondly, explaining what it did, and did not, say to those inclined to believe everything they read in the press, as well as those with vested interests be they ideological, or commercial.

I agree with Greg Brooks in that many who take issue with the 2006 Review have either not read it or have chosen to ignore its key recommendations which, for example, set phonics in the context of a powerfully enriched primary school curriculum that prioritises literacy, with serious attention given to developing spoken language and attentive listening alongside reading and writing. ‘If they can’t say it they can’t write it’ has always seemed to me to be one of several obvious reasons for fostering ‘oracy’ from birth, as a precursor for literacy and much else. How many times and ways does the message that “high-quality phonic work is essential but not sufficient for teaching children to read”, need to be parroted before it sinks in?

I part company with Brooks, however, when he claims that the Reading Review overstates the case for synthetic phonics and conflates it with systematic phonics. So, what does the Review actually say on that score?

It says:

“Research, inspection and leading-edge work of settings and schools may inform best practice. However, findings from different research programmes are sometimes contradictory or inconclusive, and often call for further studies to test tentative findings. While robust research findings must not be ignored, developers of national

strategies, much less schools and settings, cannot always wait for the results of long-term research studies. They must take decisions, based on as much firm evidence as is available from a range of sources at the time, especially from replicable and sustainable best practice”.

Brooks applies a sleight of hand by ignoring the first, specific remit for the Review, notably, to make a judgement about:

“What best practice should be expected of early reading and synthetic phonics?”

Even though the research in 2006 may have been inconclusive the requirement was to make a judgement, not to sit on the fence. Ten years on, I would argue that the research is now far from inconclusive, rather it amounts to an even stronger case for synthetic phonics.

By any reasonable definition, ‘synthetic phonics’ is systematic, that is to say, it must be taught directly, regularly and incrementally according to a planned progression that takes full account of children’s different but developing abilities.

Moreover, ‘inconclusive’ seems to be an outcome to which educational research is particularly prone. What are teachers expected to do when research accrued over years at considerable expense comes to no conclusion and they have to teach something as crucially important as reading? One obvious response to that question is to take ‘proven practice’ (R. Slavin 2016) into account and that, too, was written into my remit as ‘best practice’.

Brooks and one of his colleagues, Carole Torgerson, had a different answer. If memory serves, having themselves already conducted a review of research on phonics, they wanted to spend another four years on a randomised control trial designed to settle the matter on synthetic phonics. This was because their review had found in favour of systematic phonics but was ambivalent about the primacy of synthetic phonics over ‘analytic phonics’. In my view and that of other members of our Advisory Group, so doing risked kicking the can down the road for another four years thus paralysing action in schools and teacher training.

Contrary to Brooks’ reflections on the run-up to my Review, we spent a great deal of time, especially in schools, observing the teaching of reading, including a very helpful visit to the famous Clackmannanshire Project. We saw most, if not all of the leading-edge published reading programmes in action and attended teacher training events. We also had the benefit of an HMI survey designed to inform the Review, plus numerous meetings of stakeholders such as parents. Though unacknowledged by Clark and Brooks, all of this is set out in the Review.

Prior to the Review, I had also taken part in HMI exercises reporting on what turned out to be a flawed, so-called ‘Searchlights’, model of reading in England’s National Literacy Strategy, as well as directly observing the teaching of reading in projects overseas, including the USA and Europe.

In consequence, we reported that:

“Having considered a wide range of evidence, the review has concluded that that the case for systematic phonic work is overwhelming and much strengthened by a synthetic approach the key features of which are to teach beginner readers:

- *grapheme/phoneme (letter/sound) correspondences (the alphabetic principle) in a clearly defined, incremental sequence*
- *to apply the highly important skill of blending (synthesising) phonemes in order all through a word to read it*
- *to apply the skills of segmenting words into their constituent phonemes to spell*
- *that blending and segmenting are reversible processes.”*

In the case of phonic work, it is very clear that for any programme to be successful, first and foremost, it must be systematic. That is ‘square one’. This much at least seems to be common ground with Brooks but less so it seems with Margaret Clark.

Judgements about synthetic phonics therefore covered one, albeit hugely important, aspect of the remit.

Brooks admits that he is theoretically disposed to accept synthetic phonics as the front runner when compared to ‘analytic phonics’. He writes:



‘I was convinced then, and still am, that theory suggests that synthetic phonics is more coherent than analytic phonics as a strategy for young learners working out unfamiliar words.’

So, the question seems to be: ‘Synthetic phonics works in practice but does it work in theory?’ Fair dues – Greg is working on it.

He will no doubt take on board the spectacular success of England shown in the latest PIRLS data as reported by the BBC: ‘Northern Ireland and England are in the top 10 of the world’s best primary school readers in global rankings.’

And, reflect on the comments about the Phonics Check in the DFE report – Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) National Report for England December 2016:

“The present PIRLS findings provide additional support for the efficacy of phonics approaches, and in particular, the utility of the phonics check for flagging pupils’ potential for lower reading performance in their future schooling. Additionally, the correlation between the phonics check and PIRLS performance also potentially bodes well for England’s pupils’ average performance in future PIRLS cycles, as 58% of pupils met the phonics check expected standard in 2012, whereas this has increased to 81% in 2017. Pupils who met this standard in 2012 had an average PIRLS 2016 performance of 587, compared to the overall average of 559.”

Perhaps we should remind ourselves that wars have winners and losers, and in this phoney battle over phonics, the risk is that the real losers will be children, especially those who struggle to learn to read and of whom much more needs to be said than can be covered in this paper.

Today, as I write, the BBC is commenting on this year’s imminent OFSTED Annual Report, as follows:

- More than 100 schools have not improved in the last 10 years, education watchdog Ofsted is expected to say.

The annual report by the Chief Inspector of Schools being released on Wednesday is expected to show that 130 schools have failed to record a “good” inspection since 2005.

It is reported that of the 20,000 schools in the country, 500 of those for children of primary age and 200 for over-11s have failed to make the grade. However, 90% of all primary schools and nearly 80% of all secondary schools are rated good or outstanding, the report will say.

Clearly the rising tide of reading success in England is a cause for rejoicing but it is not yet lifting a worrying minority of boats that are firmly stuck in the mud. We need to keep working at it. Given that we know so much about ‘what works’ to secure high standards of reading in schools – perhaps we should now pay more attention to that other crucial piece of the territory and ask: what works to best effect in teacher training?

.....
*Sir Jim Rose, CBE, chaired the Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading in the UK that led to the influential Rose Report (2006).
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Notes and references

1. The phonics screening check is a statutory assessment for all pupils in Year 1 (typically aged six) to check

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whether they have met the expected standard in phonic decoding. All state-funded schools with a Year 1 cohort must administer the check. Those pupils who did not meet the standard in Year 1 or who were not checked must take part in the check at the end of Year 2 (typically aged seven).

2. *Reading the Evidence – Synthetic Phonics and Literacy Learning*, edited by Margaret Clark OBE, 2017.
3. *Essentials of Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties* by David A. Kilpatrick (Wiley, 2015).

A frank truth: All instruction guides and supports implicit learning

**Steven
Dykstra**



After recently spending time at a conference, catching up on some reading and enjoying the company of brilliant minds, I believe we need to confront some demons.

The dirty little secret of reading instruction is that no matter how much time we devote to it, a huge part of what readers learn occurs implicitly, not explicitly. We develop many skills without complete awareness of them in the same way that we learn to ride a bike without really knowing how we do it. Experts and parents who expend time trying to identify future struggling readers during infancy look for the neurological signs of a slight delay, a glitch, in how infant brains accumulate this implicit knowledge. If explicit instruction is the backbone of teaching and remediation (and it should be), implicit learning is still the biggest part of learning to read.

Is instruction necessary?

None of this diminishes the role of instruction. We know that even the most naturally gifted implicit learners, those who seem to pick up reading without any explicit instruction, still benefit from instruction when it meets their needs at the time and when it reinforces past learning. Less-gifted implicit learners are utterly dependent on instruction. Unfortunately, instruction often doesn't match the implicit learning it should be trying to support.

Implicit versus explicit learning

We need to appreciate the interface between implicit and explicit learning when we consider what to teach, when, and in what dosage. All instruction serves to guide and support implicit learning. Kids don't learn to decode because we teach them to decode. They learn to decode because their brains have certain insights, make certain connections and establish certain patterns and networks that allow them to decode. Those networks are built, refined and fine-tuned through practice and experience. Within those experiences are critical moments of explicit instruction, but we would be wrong to think that children learn to decode simply because we teach them to decode. Most of that learning, that network development, is implicit and far from consciousness. Instruction is important, even essential, but we cannot come close to teaching everything students need to learn about reading.

Those who support the scientific view of reading, as I do, are often reluctant to make this admission because they fear, as I fear now, that the habitually ill-informed will misread and misrepresent these facts to mean that kids learn to read all on their own and explicit instruction should be minimised. If implicit learning is the bigger part of the equation in learning to read, and in some ways the key to successful learning, it may seem reasonable that we should reserve learning for an implicit insight rather than to teach it explicitly. Implicit and explicit learning have been placed in a false competition with each other by widespread misunderstanding – and the effects of that are all around us still.



Our support for explicit instruction should not be a denial of implicit learning, but it can seem that way to people for whom implicit learning is a denial of explicit instruction.

Clearly, readers learn a great deal about oral language, orthography, morphology, semantics, and other aspects of linguistics from experience. Some learn more, and some learn less. The more we teach and the better we teach it (including our choice of what, when, and how we teach), the more implicit learning will occur. In economic terms, we want an explosion in implicit learning, not a monopoly. That requires explicit instruction.

Explicit instruction bolsters implicit learning

I don't think we need to worry about instruction interfering with implicit learning. I don't think that's an issue. I don't think teaching phonemes and rules and morphemes and etymology squelches implicit learning. I think it ignites it. But I do think there are only so many hours in a day and some many days in a school year.

Where do we get the most bang for our buck with any given child at any given stage of reading development? Answering that question requires us to understand how reading works and develops, how the pieces

In a world of limited resources, spending our instructional effort to the greatest benefit of the student is always the goal

work together, and the needs of the child in front of us. That's a lot to know. Do we teach the minutiae of phonics? Is that a good use of our time? Do we teach deep morphology early or save it for later? Do multi-sensory techniques have major effects on average readers or only on those who are struggling the most? Do we teach lots of etymology – or just enough for readers to understand that there are reasons for things that seem unreasonable – and some of the weirdness of English isn't so weird after all? What do we teach as the canon of knowledge and what do we trust will emerge from the foggy process of implicit learning? When should we stop trusting and take action?

Most of learning to read will happen implicitly. It must. No one lives long enough for it to work any other way. Most of it will go better

with skilled instruction to support and promote that implicit learning. It may help if we are willing to admit that implicit learning is the real goal, even as we plan and promote robust explicit instruction. We shouldn't be afraid to concede the critical place of implicit learning just because so much of what is wrong in reading instruction is, in some way, an overreliance on it.

In a world of limited resources, spending our instructional effort to the greatest benefit of the student is always the goal, and that means we need to understand that it isn't the knowledge we teach explicitly that leads to skilled reading. It is how that explicit teaching feeds the process of implicit learning. That's how children learn to read. Even if some folks get implicit learning all wrong, we shouldn't miss that point.

Steven Dykstra is a psychologist, advocate and troublemaker in the reading world. While he may be best known for his comments on SpellTalk and in other forums, he has worked with the most severely traumatised and mentally ill children for more than 25 years. His passion for reading comes from the recognition that the thousands of children he has served often pay the highest price for our failures and mistakes.
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The long history of Direct Instruction research: Part 1

**Kerry
Hempnall**



We hear a lot these days in education about the importance of evidence-based practice and explicit teaching. Any word search in current educational policies will produce numerous exhortations to educators to make use of these features in their curricula.

For example, announcing the [Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools](#) (2017), the document proclaims “The Australian Government is committed to evidence-based reform”, and evidence-based appears three times in its two pages. In the report of the [Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group \(2014\)](#), ‘evidence-based’ appears 31 times, and one recommendation was that: “The theory, methods and practices taught to pre-service teachers need to be clearly based on evidence linked to impact on student learning outcomes” (p.18).

In the report of [Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations \(2013\)](#), the term explicit occurred 10 times, and in the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (2005) – 40 times!

What is less well known is that an approach to teaching known as Direct Instruction (DI) has arguably the largest evidence-base of any current model of instruction; the earliest programs having been developed in the 1960s and many evaluations have occurred since that time. Further, it is the source from which explicit instruction emerged.

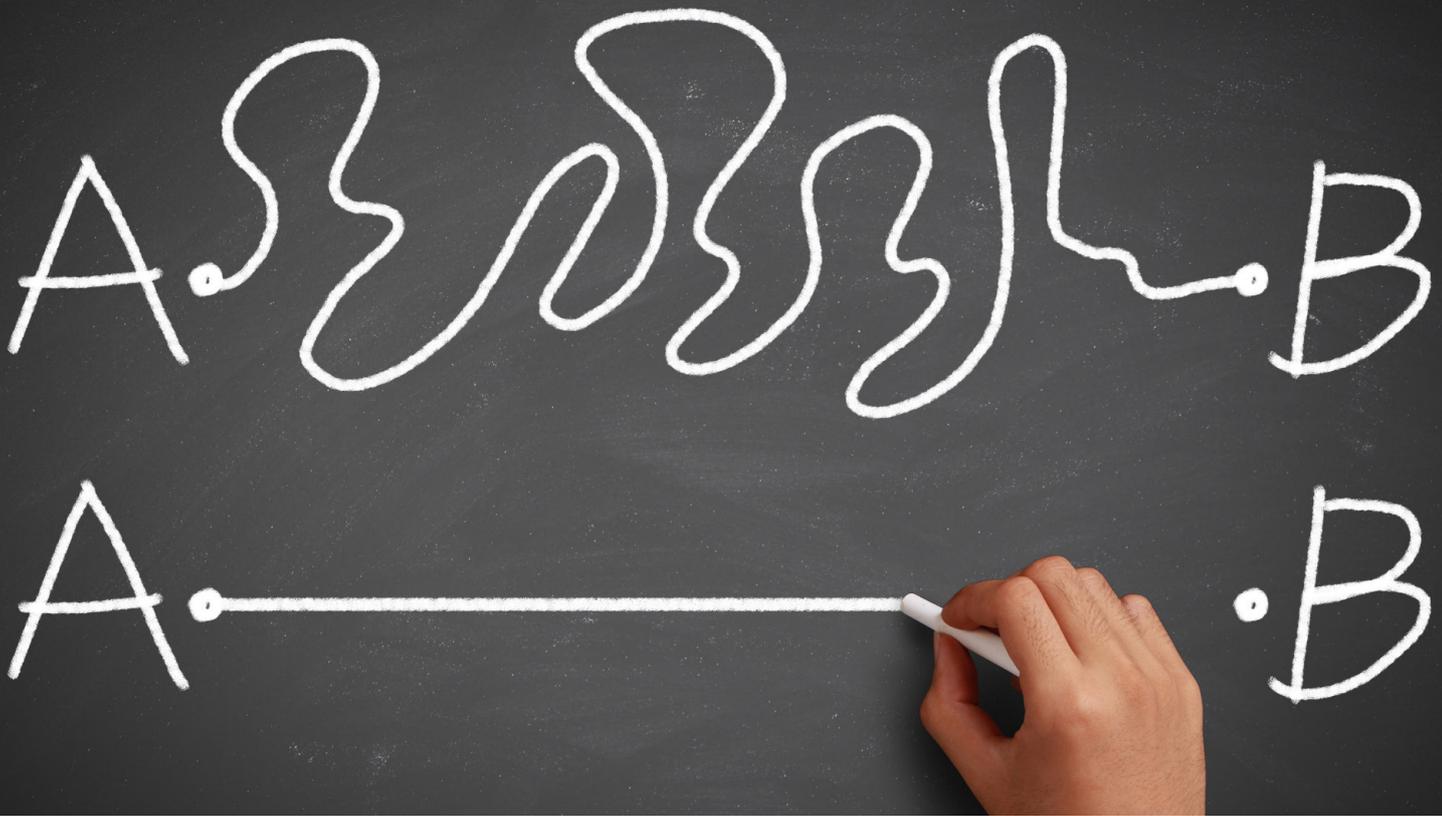
“ ... it is clear that the roots of explicit instruction come directly from Direct Instruction and direct instruction, both of which have a history of effectiveness, especially for students with, and at-risk for, LD.”
([Hughes, Morris, Therrien, & Benson, 2017](#), p.145)

So, to possibly confuse the issue, along with Direct Instruction there is also a model known as direct instruction (lower case). This latter term was initially introduced by Bereiter and Engelmann in their 1966 publication, [Teaching Disadvantaged Children in the Preschool](#).

“The direct-instruction approach assures that every objective can at least be attended to and it gives the teacher better day-to-day control over pupil progress so that she will know what objectives need additional attention.” (p. 56)

Around 1968, Engelmann and colleagues coined the upper case term: Direct Instruction, when they began employing the acronym DISTAR (Direct Instructional Systems for Teaching and Remediation) to identify their programs.

Lower case direct instruction became more broadly known when Barak Rosenshine and David Berliner first employed it in 1978. Along with others, such as Evertson, Brophy, Good, and Stevens, their work during the 1970s-1990s on process-product research (examining what teachers do in the classroom and relating these teaching behaviours to student outcomes) established what became known as the effective teaching movement. The associated effective behaviours became known as direct instruction. The two definitions are certainly related, and



upper case DI programs incorporate the principles enunciated in the lower case di research as described below. However, as we shall later see, DI also provides the curriculum content in addition to the delivery system of direct instruction. Notice in the definition below, direct instruction (which later morphed into explicit teaching) indicates that the teacher must choose or provide the curriculum. That is, curriculum design and content are not part of direct instruction.

“Direct instruction [di] pertains to a set of teaching behaviours focused on academic matters where goals are clear to students; time allocated for instruction is sufficient and continuous; content coverage is extensive; student performance is monitored; questions are at a low cognitive level and produce many correct responses; and feedback to students is immediate and academically oriented. In direct instruction, the teacher controls the instructional goals, chooses material appropriate for the student’s ability level, and paces the instructional episode.”

(Rosenshine & Berliner, 1978, p. 7)

This approach of replicating the procedures used by effective teachers (those whose students had superior outcomes to those students of other

teachers) was demonstrated to be valuable in a range of correlational and then experimental studies, such as by [Good and Grouws \(1979\)](#) in mathematics, and [Anderson, Evertson, and Brophy \(1979\)](#) in reading.

The evidence base of Direct Instruction

A 2018 paper published in the *Review of Educational Research* outlines and analyses the long history of research into the effectiveness of the various Direct Instruction programs: [The Effectiveness of Direct Instruction Curricula: A Meta-Analysis of a Half Century of Research](#), and its results may surprise those who have been inclined to dismiss it as an instructional option.

“Quantitative mixed models were used to examine literature published from 1966 through 2016 on the effectiveness of Direct Instruction. Analyses were based on 328 studies involving 413 study designs and almost 4000 effects. Results are reported for the total set and subareas regarding reading, math, language, spelling, and multiple or other academic subjects; ability measures; affective outcomes; teacher and parent views; and single-subject designs. All of the estimated effects were positive and all were statistically significant except results from metaregressions involving affective outcomes.

Characteristics of the publications, methodology, and sample were not systematically related to effect estimates. Effects showed little decline during maintenance, and effects for academic subjects were greater when students had more exposure to the programs. Estimated effects were educationally significant, moderate to large when using the traditional psychological benchmarks, and similar in magnitude to effect sizes that reflect performance gaps between more and less advantaged students.”
(Stockard, Wood, Coughlin, & Khoury, 2018, p.1)

“The strong positive results were similar across the 50 years of data; in articles, dissertations, and gray literature; across different types of research designs, assessments, outcome measures, and methods of calculating effects; across different types of samples and locales, student poverty status, race-ethnicity, at-risk status, and grade; across subjects and programs; after the intervention ceased; with researchers or teachers delivering the intervention; with experimental or usual

comparison programs; and when other analytic methods, a broader sample, or other control variables were used.”

(Stockard, Wood, Coughlin, & Khoury, 2018, p.22)

These outcomes are impressive given the wide range of study designs, sample sizes, educational domains, and evaluation tools employed across the studies. Although there were variations across programs, effect size for the total sample was 0.60, with the 95% confidence interval within 0.54 to 0.66. This is a little lower than previous meta-analyses that analysed smaller samples, such as [White's 1988 meta-analysis](#) (25 studies in special education) which reported an effect size of 0.84. In the [Adams and Engelmann](#) meta-analysis in 1996, 37 research articles met the criteria for inclusion, producing an effect size of 0.87. More recently, John Hattie (2009) reached broadly similar conclusions about the size of effect:

“One of the common criticisms is that Direct Instruction works with very low-level or specific skills, and with lower ability and the youngest students. These are not the findings from the meta-analyses. The effects of Direct Instruction are similar for regular ($d=0.99$), and special education and lower ability students ($d=0.86$), higher for reading ($d=0.89$) than for mathematics ($d=0.50$), similar for the more low-level word attack ($d=0.64$) and also for high-level comprehension ($d=0.54$), and similar for elementary and high school students. The messages of these meta-analyses on Direct Instruction underline the power of stating the learning intentions and success criteria, and then engaging students in moving towards these. The teacher needs to invite the students to learn, provide much deliberative practice and modeling, and provide appropriate feedback and multiple opportunities to learn. Students need opportunities for independent practice, and then

“One of the common criticisms is that Direct Instruction works with very low-level or specific skills, and with lower ability and the youngest students. These are not the findings from the meta-analyses.”

there need to be opportunities to learn the skill or knowledge implicit in the learning intention in contexts other than those directly taught.” ([Hattie, 2009](#), pp. 206-7)

For greater detail of evaluations into each of the various programs, see [Writings on Direct Instruction: A Bibliography](#).

An important element in the 2018 meta-analysis is the durability of effects. It is a well-known issue in program evaluation that published programs may be shown sometimes to display a worthwhile effect immediately following intervention, but either no follow-up is instituted, say in six months or a year, or if it is performed, the effects appear to have washed out over that period. This often occurs with short-term interventions, and in those in which insufficient feedback and practice are incorporated.

Other important finding is that of a dose-response relationship, that is, the effects become larger if students are provided with more exposure to the programs. This counteracts the potential explanation of success that any apparent effects in the short term are due to novelty – the increased motivation wrought by participating in a new program. Unsurprisingly, the programs proved more powerful when introduced early in students' school careers.

“Earlier literature had led us to expect that effect sizes

would be larger when students had greater exposure to the programs, and this hypothesis was supported for most of the analyses involving academic subjects. Significantly stronger results appeared for the total group, reading, math, and spelling for students who began the programs in kindergarten; for the total group and reading for students who had more years of intervention; and for math students with more daily exposure. Although we had expected that effects could be lower at maintenance than immediately post-intervention, the decline was significant in only two of the analyses (math and language) and not substantial in either.”

(Stockard, Wood, Coughlin, & Khoury, 2018, p. 22-23)

For findings of other reports and studies on DI, see [Reviews supporting Direct Instruction program effectiveness Updated 2018](#).

Some argue that small studies and those with a variety of designs are inappropriate inclusions in a meta-analysis. It is obviously important to examine the highest quality research – experimental studies with random allocation, because they provide good internal validity. That is, they provide a measure of confidence that any effects noted can be attributed to the intervention, rather than to extraneous variables. Small quasi-experimental studies can be flawed in various ways; however, error is diffused and less of concern when consistent effects are noted across many studies ([Stanovich & Stanovich, 2003](#)). So, we should not dismiss small studies or those with less sophisticated design. They can add balance, providing external validity that is often missing from small or short term randomised controlled trials.

“... observational data sometimes meet the assumptions of a quasi-experimental design, at least approximately, such that causal conclusions are credible. If so, the estimates of quasi-experimental designs – which

exploit naturally occurring selection processes and real-world implementations of the treatment – are frequently better generalizable than the results from a controlled laboratory experiment.

Thus, if external validity is a major concern, the results of randomized experiments should always be complemented by findings from valid quasi-experiments.” (Kim & Steiner, 2016, p.404)

A confluence of findings from numerous studies allows some confidence that the interventions will produce effects across a range of settings, not solely in the single experimental setting. So, the aggregation of data from many different studies is capable of producing a meaningful and valid conclusion (Slavin, 2003). However, that does not mean that studies with faulty designs should be included.

The 2018 study’s selection criteria led to the rejection of 221 studies for a variety of reasons, including insufficient information and methodological shortcomings. Of the 549 studies identified, 328 were subsequently included in the analyses.

“The over-arching evaluative concept educational practitioners

should hold is that replicability of findings is the most important scientific standard for research findings to meet. That is, replicability of findings is the most useful form of evidence-based information of effectiveness, not the findings of a single study, no matter how well such studies are designed. In emphasising replicability, the logical structure of multiple-baseline designs (see Sidman, 1960) is a far more appropriate design framework for the evaluation of the effectiveness of instructional interventions than traditional group designs because they involve intrastudy replications of the effects of experimental interventions across what Campbell and Stanley (1963) call “time series”. (Vitale & Kaniuka, 2012, p. 28-29)

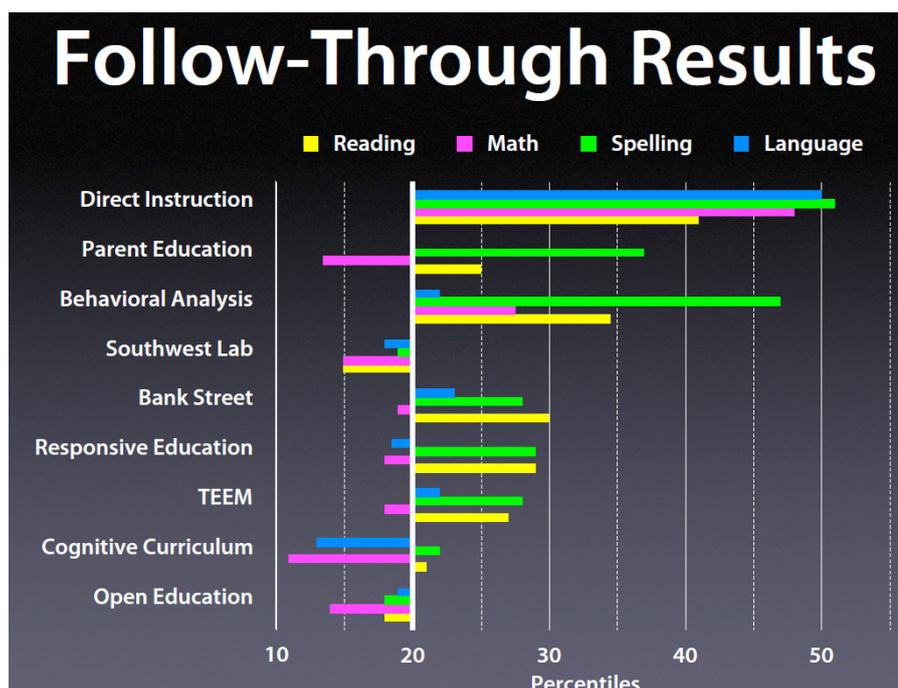
Project Follow Through

The newer research analyses are welcome, but the findings are not new. Similar findings were reported in a huge study in the USA many years ago. This study was federally funded in the USA in the late 1960’s, arising because of a concern about the poor educational outcomes achieved for disadvantaged

students. Entitled Project Follow Through (Engelmann, Becker, Carnine, & Gersten, 1988), the study involved 75,000 children in 180 communities over the first three years of their school career. This was the largest educational experiment ever undertaken, extending from 1967 to 1995, at a cost of almost a billion dollars. There were comparisons across 20 competing sponsors covering a broad range of educational philosophies. They included models of child-directed learning, individualised instruction, language experience, learning styles, self-esteem development, cognitive emphasis, parent-based teaching, Direct Instruction, and behavioural teaching. The models can be reduced to three distinct themes – those whose instruction emphasised either basic academic outcomes, cognitive development, or affective development. The targeted basic skills for the evaluations were reading, language, spelling, writing, and maths. As it did in each of the other basic skills areas, in reading, the Direct Instruction model, which has a strong phonics emphasis, had the most impressive results in both academic and affective areas.

“The Direct Instruction model had an unequivocally higher average effect on scores in the basic skills domain than did any other model. Finding 3: Where models have put their primary emphasis elsewhere than on the basic skills, the children they served have tended to score lower on tests of these skills than they would have done without Follow Through. All models other than those labelled “Basic Skills” had more negative than positive outcomes on measures in the basic skill domain.” (Watkins, 1997, p. 32-33)

Follow-up studies were performed three, six, and nine years after the DI students completed Follow Through. They showed strong consistent long term benefits in reading (Gersten, Keating, & Becker, 1988); effects that were evidenced in higher achievement, fewer grade retentions, and more university acceptances than in comparison groups that had traditional education in the same communities.



Source: Slocum, Stenhoff, and Van Schaack (2003)



“We offer *Project Follow Through* results as support for a direct, explicit approach to teaching; however, it is important to point out that although Direct Instruction includes the majority of the elements of explicit instruction and is based on such principles as increasing on-task behaviors, high levels of success, and content coverage, it is distinguished from explicit instruction by its emphasis on curriculum design (Stein, Carnine, & Dixon, 1998). Aside from this curriculum based distinction, the overlap of teaching procedures is extensive.” (Archer & Hughes, 2011, p.14-15)

What also may not be well known is the long history of DI research in Australia, particularly through Alex Maggs’ contributions. The early studies include those by [Becker, Engelmann, Carnine, and Maggs \(1979\)](#), [Booth \(1978\)](#), [Bracey, Maggs, and Morath \(1975\)](#), [Calder \(1982\)](#), [Clunies-Ross \(1990\)](#), [Fields \(1986\)](#), [Gersten and Maggs \(1982\)](#), [Kenny \(1980\)](#), [Leach & Siddall \(1990\)](#), [Lockyer and Maggs \(1982\)](#), [McLean & Moore \(1985\)](#), [Maggs and Moore \(1978\)](#), [Maggs and Morath \(1976\)](#), [Maggs and White \(1982\)](#), [Maggs \(1976\)](#), [Maggs and Moore \(1983\)](#), [Maggs and Murdoch](#)

(1979), [Maggs, Moore, and Boldie \(1978\)](#), and [Taylor, de Lacey, and Nurcombe \(1974\)](#).

What features of the model are most significant?

“The sponsors of the Direct Instruction model ... developed the most effective instructional method that is currently available. They could not have done so, however, had they not looked at teaching as a technology and at learning as an orderly process. It is this view of learning that is critical to convey to the educational community. Educators must be taught that learning is a function of the student-teacher interaction, the instructional moment. They must learn that there are qualitative variations in those interactions and that the function of educational research is to determine what types of interactions, or methods, lead to the most change with the least resources.” (Watkins, 1997, p. 90-91).

For more reading on Follow Through, see [Direct Instruction and Project Follow Through: A Bibliography](#).

So, DI has been around a long time – how many other approaches can you

think of that have accrued a large body of supportive evidence over 50 years? OK, but surely that means it’s old, and has been surpassed by other new and shiny approaches that take into account more up-to-date program development and research. That view may have some justification if the currently available DI programs were 50 years old. However, they have been constantly updated as new relevant evidence accrues. Further, the vast research data banks on each program are analysed by the designers to find details within the program structure or content that would benefit from re-writing in a new edition. Far from being moribund, there have been six new DI programs published since 2000. In the 2018 meta-analysis, more than half the research was conducted in the last 20 years.

In a second part to this paper, the major elements underpinning the Direct Instruction model will be described.

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How well prepared are Australian preservice teachers to teach early reading skills?

According to national and international reports, Australian school students' performance in reading has shown a steady decline and a large percentage of students fail to achieve the reading skills necessary for life after school ([Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017](#); [Thomson, De Bortoli, & Underwood, 2017](#)).

As with any area of learning, reading included, it is the beginning instruction that supplies the foundation on which to build more complex skills and knowledge. The two main skills that are necessary for early reading success are phonemic awareness and phonics. Phonemic awareness focuses on the smallest units of speech sounds in words, and phonics knowledge is based on the relationship between the alphabet letters and their corresponding sounds (phonemes). Research has shown that phonics knowledge plays a significant role in learning to read and spell, and that it is best taught using a systematic and explicit approach. Initial reading instruction, therefore, needs to be organised and delivered according to best practice identified in the research.

Following a systematic review of the literature in which the preparedness and knowledge of preservice teachers to teach early reading was investigated (Meeks, Stephenson, Kemp, & Madelaine, 2017), a survey, based on the surveys used in the research, was designed to investigate the subject-specific early reading knowledge of final-year preservice teachers enrolled in Australian primary and early childhood teacher education programs (see Meeks & Kemp, 2017, for the complete paper). Although all Australian teacher education institutions were invited to participate only 25% agreed to forward the survey to their students.

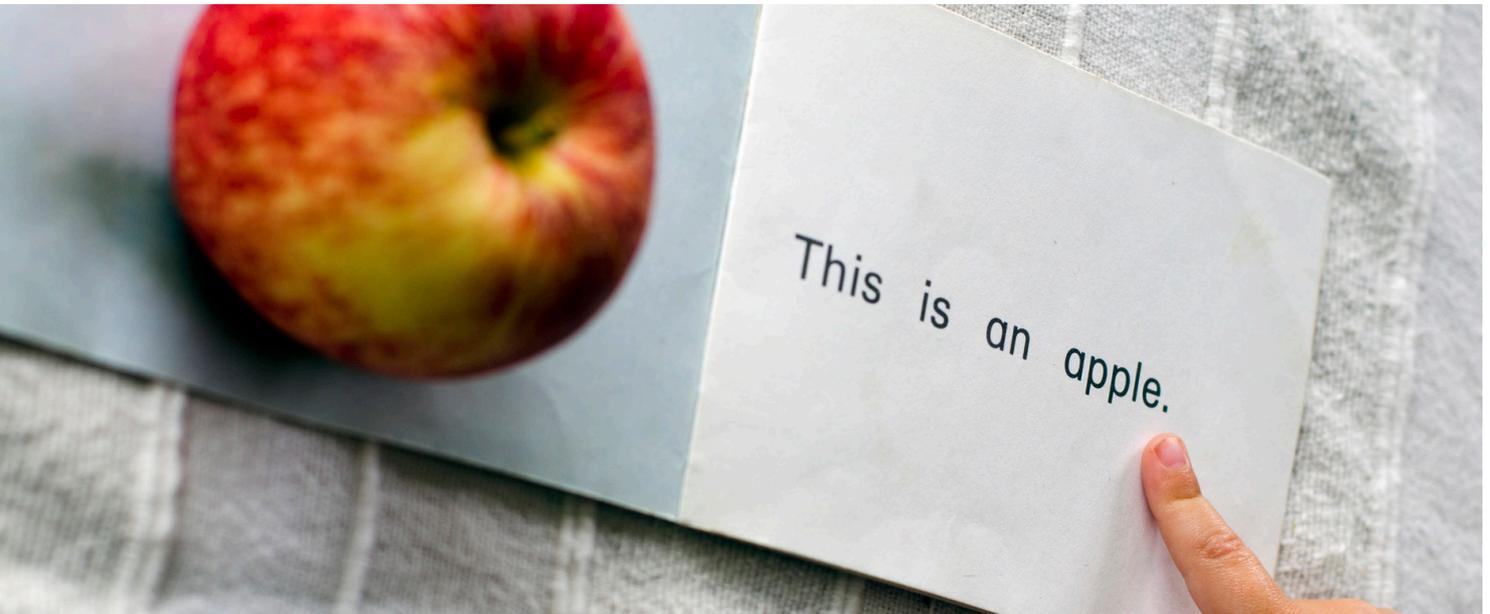
Preservice teachers' perception of their preparedness and ability to teach beginning reading and spelling was investigated as part of the study. The term preparedness was used to describe how well an institution was perceived to have provided the knowledge and skills necessary to teach beginning reading and spelling. On average, preservice teachers perceived themselves as being prepared. However, when questioned about their ability to teach the content of phonological awareness and phonics skills, up to 50% of preservice teachers indicated that they were not confident in their ability to teach these particular components of early literacy.

Preservice teachers' content knowledge and skills to teach early reading and spelling were also investigated. Results indicated that preservice teachers' knowledge of specific components of early reading instruction, such as phonemic awareness and phonics, was highly variable. For example, although most preservice teachers chose the correct definition for the word phoneme, fewer than half chose the correct definition for the term phonemic awareness. Most preservice teachers could select a pair of words that had the same initial sound, but many were unable to reverse the sounds in 'ice'



**Lin
Meeks**

How well prepared are Australian preservice teachers?



and 'enough', or count phonemes in words. Questions designed to assess phonics knowledge revealed that fewer than half of respondents correctly defined the term 'consonant blend', and only 11% correctly identified a word that contained an open syllable. It is interesting to note that the correlation between the preservice teachers' perception of their preparedness and ability to teach early reading and their knowledge and skill, as measured by the survey, was small and statistically non-significant.

The results of this study support the findings of previous research that few preservice teachers have sufficient knowledge and expertise to be effective teachers of early reading and spelling despite the fact that they generally believe that they are well prepared to teach these skills. These results indicate that there may be a need for reform in teacher preparation programs, especially in the area of early reading instruction.

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Questions designed to assess phonics knowledge revealed that fewer than half of respondents correctly defined the term 'consonant blend'

Introducing the ...

Institute of Special Educators

Background

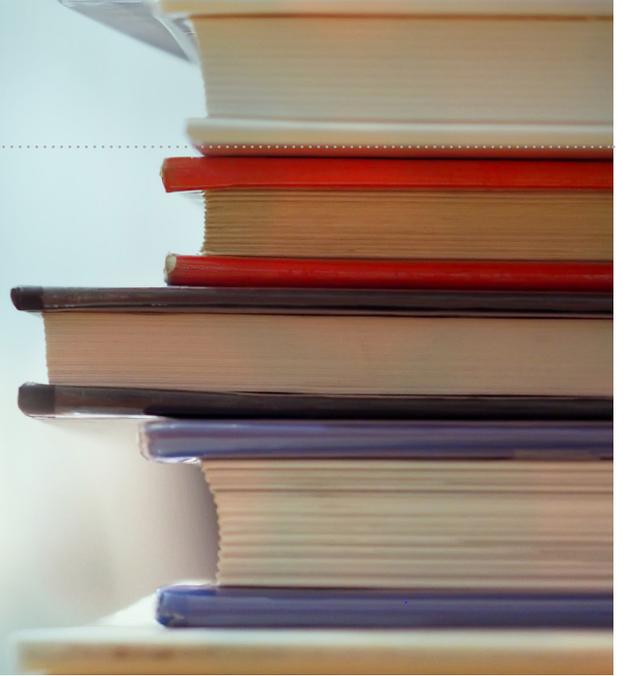
When qualifications in special education were first promoted and supported by Departments of Education in Australia from the mid-1970s, the future for individuals with special education needs looked to be much brighter than had been the case in the first half of the 20th century. Research had demonstrated that individuals with significant disabilities could learn despite low-level skills and a poor prognosis.

Initially not all special education positions were filled by qualified Special Educators. This was to be expected, given that this was a newly emerging profession. However, despite years of research into effective interventions for individuals with a range of disabilities and learning difficulties, the introduction of university courses to prepare personnel working with individuals with disabilities, innovative transition to work and job support programs, and government department support for cadetships in special education, the percentage of qualified Special Educators working in special schools and classes, in support roles in schools and in early intervention and post-school programs is unacceptably low. This is particularly disturbing when there is evidence to suggest that qualified Special Educators are more likely to achieve better outcomes for their clients than those without these qualifications.

The plight of special education in Australia is well illustrated by the fact that the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) does not recognise special education as a profession separate from the teaching profession, thereby potentially denying effective quality of life programs, particularly for those individuals with disabilities outside the school system. The lack of expertise in special education among many of those holding special education positions in schools, and also those supervising such positions, has potentially devastating consequences for students with additional needs in special settings, and more particularly in inclusive settings. For these students, evidence-based interventions are in danger of being the exception rather than the rule.

The Institute of Special Educators, or InSpEd, has been established to enhance the status of Special Educators. It is clear from an examination of many advertisements for a range of professional positions, both within and outside the education sector, that registration/accreditation is a requirement for the demonstration of professional credibility. Lack of accreditation for Special Educators is likely to be a major reason why special education is not recognised by the NDIA despite the fact that special education research has been primary in the establishment of the evidence base for effective interventions in the area of disability. By contrast, psychologists and therapists, who are registered, are recognised by the NDIA. This lack of recognition of the value of special education may well have influenced a decline in the quality of special education courses at the tertiary level. For that reason, the Institute of Special Educators seeks also to address the quality of the university courses offered by establishing minimum requirements for both course content and practicum/internships.





Definition of terms

A Special Educator is, as a result of advanced study, well-versed and competent in the models, methods and technologies underpinning effective research-based instruction for children and adults who struggle to make regular developmental, academic and/or social progress for a variety of environmental and biological reasons including those with intellectual disabilities, multiple disabilities, sensory impairments, autism spectrum disorders, behaviour/conduct disorders and learning difficulties. They may work in early intervention, preschool and long day care settings, regular and special schools and classes, adult day programs and job-support services.

Aim of the Institute of Special Educators

InSpEd aims to improve the quality of special education provision in Australia, including special education for (1) infants and young children in early intervention services, (2) children and young adults in school programs and (3) adults in tertiary education, job support programs, post school activity programs and other services designed to improve quality of life.

In the first instance, the Institute will provide all suitably qualified Special Educators with peer-based recognition through a 'Certification' process that will confirm their status as true professionals in their chosen field. The Certification standards established by the Institute will be recognised Australia-wide and internationally, and will also provide employers with a sense of professional confidence in employing 'certified' staff.

InSpEd objectives

- Provide a mechanism for certifying Special Educators
- Establish/maintain a highly qualified

panel of experts to:

- determine criteria/standards for certifying teachers and other professionals who have a graduate/postgraduate qualification in special education
- assess applications for 'Certification' of Special Educators
- determine hours and type of professional learning required to maintain Certification as a generalist or specialist Special Educator
- assess the quality of courses offering a qualification in special education with the purpose of offering student accreditation to those enrolled in approved courses
- Offer professional development for New Graduate and Certified Special Educators and accredit appropriate professional learning offered by others
- Disseminate information in the form of research summaries, newsletters and magazines to assist Special Educators to keep up to date with developments in their field
- Advocate on behalf of Special Educators with State and Federal governments
- Facilitate employment opportunities for Certified Special Educators
- Assist employers to select appropriately qualified and Certified Special Education staff

Progress to date

The Institute of Special Educators is now a registered not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, with a constitution that embodies the principles outlined above. It has established an expert panel and has its own InSpEd website at www.insped.org.au.

For further information about joining InSpEd, please contact info@insped.org.au.

Lack of accreditation for Special Educators is likely to be a major reason why special education is not recognised by the NDIA despite the fact that special education research has been primary in the establishment of the evidence base for effective interventions in the area of disability

New series of InitialLit Readers for Year 1 students

MultiLit has released a second set of 60 illustrated phonic readers – this time for Year 1 readers.

MultiLit has developed two sets of 60 phonic readers for children who are just learning to read. These delightful decodable books are carefully sequenced to encourage children to use good reading strategies from the start.

The decodable InitialLit Readers were developed to support InitialLit – a whole-class literacy instruction program for Foundation to Year 2 children.

InitialLit–F Readers (Levels 1-9), first released in 2016, are designed for children in the Foundation year of school. InitialLit–1 Readers (Levels 10-16), released in 2017, are for Year 1 students. Different text types, such as information texts, poems and plays, have been introduced in Levels 10-16.

Books are available in classroom sets (six copies of each title), full sets, level bundles or individually.

Have fun with *Mick and Dan*, *Super Pug* and *Blip the Android* while providing much-needed practice for children just beginning to discover the joy of reading.

