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Bulletin

Response to Intervention: Giving children a second (and third) chance for reading success

From the President

Dr Robyn Wheldall

As 2021 draws to a close, I am delighted to be writing this column as the new President of Learning Difficulties Australia (LDA).

At the Annual General Meeting held in September 2021, significant changes occurred in the governing body of the LDA Council. More details about this change are presented in the Council News on page 5 and on the LDA website at *https://www.ldaustralia.org/about/meetourteam/*.

LDA has a long and proud history of supporting and advocating for students with learning difficulties, and the 2021-22 Council is committed to LDA continuing to pursue its mission of assisting students with learning difficulties through effective teaching practices based on scientific research, both in the classroom and through individualised instruction.

LDA also has an important role to play in ensuring that *all students* are the beneficiaries of effective instruction across the spectrum of educational settings. Knowledge about effective practice must be imparted to teachers everywhere, so that the very best evidence-based instruction can be employed in every classroom. Apart from being what every student needs, it is most important that students with learning challenges are in environments that will support and consolidate the gains that they make as a result of more individualised and specialised support.

There are students with learning difficulties in every classroom, and knowing how to support them is the business of every teacher. But even with the very best instruction in the classroom, there will always be a small percentage of students who require additional, often more intensive, support. LDA is committed not only to providing this support directly via our LDA consultant network, but also by helping to ensure that there is an understanding of evidence-based practice across Tiers 1, 2 and 3 in a Response to Intervention or Multi-Tier Support System framework – a topic explored in this issue of the LDA Bulletin. This includes promoting approaches that are complementary across the different tiers of instruction that a student with learning difficulties may encounter. The expert knowledge of specialist educators is critical for students with learning difficulties to succeed in every educational setting. LDA is firmly committed to sharing this expertise with others.

As noted in several of the acceptance speeches given by our 2021 LDA Award recipients (see pages 10 to 12), a very encouraging development in the field of education has been occurring over recent years, with evidence-based approaches to teaching being taken up by increasing numbers of teachers. We have seen, particularly over the last couple of years, and in some ways aided by the COVID19 pandemic (which has made people more comfortable with platforms like Zoom), a strong and rapid growth of teacher organisations that have attracted thousands of followers in a relatively short period of time. This is a cause for great celebration. The amount of free professional development that has come out of these movements is extraordinary. LDA's activities have contributed strongly to this area as well, with excellent offerings in the professional development area including the Wednesday Weekly Webinar series in 2020 and 2021 and the popular recent six session Science of Writing course. These initiatives have been very well received and have also resulted in a growth in LDA membership, which is now over 800 members (and growing weekly). We can be rightly proud of the impact that our organisation has had.

There *is* evidence of a turning tide, but there is also a great deal still to be done. We believe that LDA has a distinctive place in the evidence-based educational landscape. We want to help build that awareness and those skills that are needed to best support our most vulnerable learners, wherever they are educated.

As well as reaching out to others in the educational community, our association has a responsibility to nurture, encourage and nourish its own members. The excellent work in the publications area of LDA – the *Bulletin* and the *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties* – is another distinctive and important way in which LDA achieves this purpose. The recently released new LDA website is also a valuable resource for members and non-members alike.

The new 2021-2022 LDA Council has a great deal of breadth and depth. We are classroom teachers, special educators, speech pathologists, academics and researchers, as well as being experienced in running both not-for-profit and commercial organisations. Together we also have a great deal of LDA experience, as well as including some members who are new to Council and bring in valuable fresh ideas and approaches. There are also a great many people with exceptional skills within the wider LDA membership who are committed to its mission. Their expertise should continue to be harnessed in the context of a collegial, respectful, and strong organisation. In so doing, others may continue to join our number.

As LDA President, I want to express my thanks to a number of people. Bec Rangas is our very busy and talented (and always cheerful) Administration Officer at LDA who has helped enormously in the transition to a largely new Council. A great deal of work goes on behind the scenes to ensure that all that needs to be done is done. The new Council would like to say a big thank you to Bec for all her help in this transition phase and we look forward to continuing to work with her. I would also like to thank members of the new Council for enthusiastically embracing roles as Committee Convenors and members. Every Council member is engaged in at least one LDA Committee. The hard-working Executive (the five office bearers of the association) has also displayed

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extraordinary commitment to moving LDA forward and I thank them sincerely for all their efforts. A special thank you to Kristin Anthian, who stepped in right after the AGM to take on the role of Acting Convenor of the Professional Development Committee, charged with delivering the Science of Writing series to more than 950 delegates in October and November. Kristin went to extraordinary lengths to ensure that this was a successful professional learning series. Thanks are also due to Geoff Ongley of *Training 24/7*, who volunteered many hours to ensure everything worked on the technical side for this extended event. We are delighted and enormously appreciative that Geoff has offered to provide volunteer services as the LDA IT Consultant going forward. We are very fortunate indeed to have so many talented and committed people working together to deliver services to our members, the wider educational community, and to the individuals with learning difficulties who we seek to serve.

I would also like to thank the outgoing Council, some of whom have served LDA for many years. We acknowledge and applaud the work that has been done to increase teacher awareness of best practice instruction and how to do this in classrooms and other educational settings around Australia. We are committed to building on their vital work.

Dr Robyn Wheldall, BA, Ph.D., MAICD, is an Honorary Research Fellow of Macquarie University, a Founding Director of MultiLit Pty Ltd., and the Deputy Director of the MultiLit Research Unit.

Consultant notes

Elaine McLeish, Convenor, Consultants Committee

It is a very exciting time for me to be returning to LDA Council and taking on the role of Consultant Convenor. I first want to express my great appreciation for the magnificent work of my predecessor, Olivia Connelly, who was tireless in her efforts on behalf of LDA Consultants through 15 extremely busy and demanding months.

Many Consultant Members know me well from my days managing the Victorian phone referral service (2002 to 2011) and then as Consultant Administrator until my retirement in November 2020. I first joined LDA as a Consultant Member in 1998 and am now a proud Life Member.

The Consultant Committee is fortunate to still have two stalwart supporters of LDA and Consultants in our ranks. Diane Barwood and Jan Roberts are both Life Members, Network leaders, past Presidents, Consultant Convenors, and recipients of the Rosemary Carter Award.

We've also welcomed two brand new Council members to the Committee. Felicity Brown is a Victorian Consultant who has represented the Glen Waverley Network for many years. She has a Masters in Special Education, 37 years secondary teaching experience, has been a member of LDA for over 25 years, and a Consultant in private practice for seven years. Felicity is also a member of the Governance sub-committee with a strong interest in the management of change to LDA's Constitution and in ensuring it best meets the needs of all members.

Eleanor McMillan from the ACT is the other new member. Eleanor holds dual qualifications in Speech Pathology and Education and is currently an Executive Teacher in Learning Support and RTI in a secondary school. She is also actively involved in LDA's Professional Development Committee.

The Committee has been very busy in the months since the September AGM. Unfortunately we have needed to spend a lot of time identifying problems with the new website and requesting modifications, but we are optimistic that these will be rectified by the time you read this. We have also been planning for the inclusion of Allied Health professionals as Consultant Members, with an initial focus on Speech Pathologists. I will provide more information about this in my next report when we will be much further advanced in our planning and possibly already welcoming suitably qualified Speech Pathologists as Consultant Members.

Wherever you are in Australia, I hope you enjoy a happy and safe holiday season.

Elaine McLeish is now retired and divides her time between Northcote and Cape Paterson. She has five grandchildren and a German Shorthaired Pointer, who all keep her on her toes. She is delighted to be part of the new Council with a shared commitment to pursue the LDA Mission Statement.

Council news

The LDA Annual General Meeting was held via Zoom on 18 September 2021. That meeting heralded very significant changes to the LDA Council.

The AGM had been preceded by an LDA Special General Meeting (SGM) held on 21 June 2021. After extensive debate, two motions that had been approved by the majority of existing council members and the General Manager did not achieve the 75% majority vote from the membership to pass. A motion to change the structure of LDA from an Incorporated Association to a Company Limited by Guarantee, along with a new constitution, received 58% votes in favour, and a motion to change the name of LDA to 'Effective Teaching Australia' received 39% votes in favour.

For a variety of reasons, the majority of 2020-2021 Council members decided not to renominate for election at the AGM in September. President Lorraine Hammond, Vice President Nicole Todd, Treasurer Renae Watkins, Secretary Sarah Asome and ordinary members Bartek Rajkowski, Sally Robinson-Kooi, and Troy Verey all announced their decision not to renominate in the period just before the AGM, while Lyn Stone, David Morkunas, Priscilla Carlisle and Olivia Connelly had already announced their resignations in the preceding weeks. General Manager Michael Roberts announced his resignation at the AGM as well. That left only two members of the 2020-2021 Council standing when nominations for the 2021-2022 Council closed (Vice President Molly de Lemos and ordinary member Roslyn Neilson), along with Bec Rangas, the LDA Administration Officer, to provide continuity.

A group of enthusiastic new nominees, however, had already risen to the occasion. No voting process had been needed prior to the AGM because there were still fewer nominees than positions available. At the AGM the members of the new incoming Council for 2021-2022 were announced: President Robyn Wheldall, Vice President Molly de Lemos, and Elaine McLeish, Eleanor McMillan, Alison Madelaine, Roslyn Neilson, Ann Ryan and Kevin Wheldall as ordinary members. This left six casual vacancies on Council. Kristin Anthian was appointed to Council immediately after the AGM to fill one of these casual vacancies, and in the few weeks after that, following a call to LDA members for further expressions of interest, Felicity Brown, Kate de Bruin, Jacinta Conway, Melanie Henry and Michelle van Puyvelde were appointed to fill the remaining vacancies. The Executive positions were filled at a council meeting held immediately after the AGM: Vice President Elaine McLeish, Treasurer Ann Ryan and Secretary Roslyn Neilson. Information about all the 2021-2022 Council members is available on the LDA website *here* (see https://www.ldaustralia.org/about/meetourteam/).

The full texts of the AGM presentations from the outgoing President Lorraine Hammond and outgoing General Manager Michael Roberts are available on the LDA website, and may be accessed at:

- 2021 Outgoing President's Report *https://bit.ly/LDA2021PresReport*
- 2021 Outgoing GM's Report *https://bit.ly/LDA2021GMReport*

Both Lorraine Hammond's and Michael Roberts' presentations documented the success with which LDA has conducted professional development during the pandemic and noted the steady increase in LDA membership. They commented on the launch of the new website, and thanked Renae Watkins and Bartek Rajkowski for their work on that. Lorraine also extended thanks to the Council members who had resigned or not renominated, and she wished the incoming Council well. Nicole Todd followed up with a particular vote of thanks to Lorraine Hammond for all her work for LDA over the years.

Incoming President Robyn Wheldall thanked the outgoing Council, welcomed the new Council, and reiterated the importance of LDA's values and mission.

At the end of the AGM a resolution was passed confirming that the incoming 2021-2022 Council would facilitate further consideration of a new legal structure and constitutional review for LDA, following full consultation with LDA members.

The period following the 2021 AGM has proved to be a stimulating challenge for the 2021-2022 Council members. We have appreciated the organisational skills of Bec Rangas as we have learned how to use Google Workspace for regular, efficient and productive communication. We are developing and refining our committee structure, as well as shaping the committees to meet the needs of current tasks. These tasks include continued work on the website, including website handling of membership data and processes for Consultant members, and further consideration of the legal structure and LDA constitution. We are making the best use possible of the considerable expertise within Council, ensuring that every Council member has the opportunity to contribute their skills. We are debating how and when we need to recruit outside people with expertise to meet all current LDA demands. We are all confident that the future of LDA is in safe and enthusiastic hands.

Importantly, Kristin Anthian immediately took on the role of Acting Convenor of the Professional Development Committee so that she could facilitate the Science of Writing Course that had been arranged by outgoing Council member Lyn Stone and Michael Roberts. Contracts were signed, IT assistance was sought and was very generously volunteered by *Training 24/7*, and Bec Rangas continued to manage the bookings and payments. All the members of the Professional Development Committee worked very hard on this, and they deserve sincere thanks for taking on this major responsibility for LDA at such short notice. Feedback on the evaluations of the Science of Writing Course will be published in the next Bulletin.

LDA members and potential members are encouraged to contact our Administration Officer Bec Rangas at *enquiries@ldaustralia.org* if they have any queries, problems, or suggestions.

Ros Neilson
LDA Secretary

Changing of the Guard: Editorship of the *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*

One very important change within LDA that was not documented at the 2021 September AGM is the handover of the editorship of the LDA's flagship peer-reviewed research journal, the *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties* (*AJLD*). Dr Tanya Serry has managed the responsible task of editing the journal with efficiency and flair for four years, and on her resignation the position has been taken up by joint editors Professor Emeritus Kevin Wheldall and Dr Alison Madelaine, assisted by Dr Nicola Bell. The first issue for which the new editors are responsible will be published in 2022.

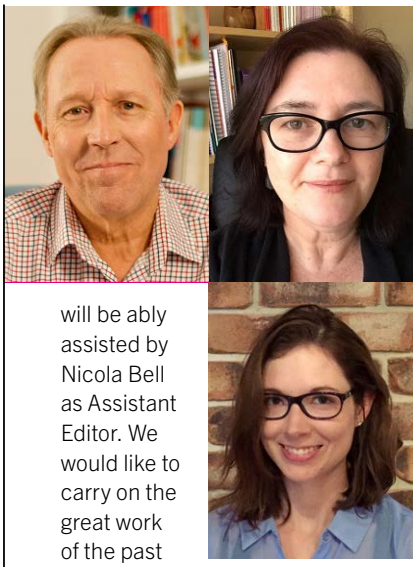
Sincere thanks from LDA are due to Tanya Serry for her excellent efforts as *AJLD* Editor – her work has been much appreciated. LDA also extends thanks to Kevin Wheldall, Alison Madelaine and Nicola Bell for taking over the Editor role and responsibilities.

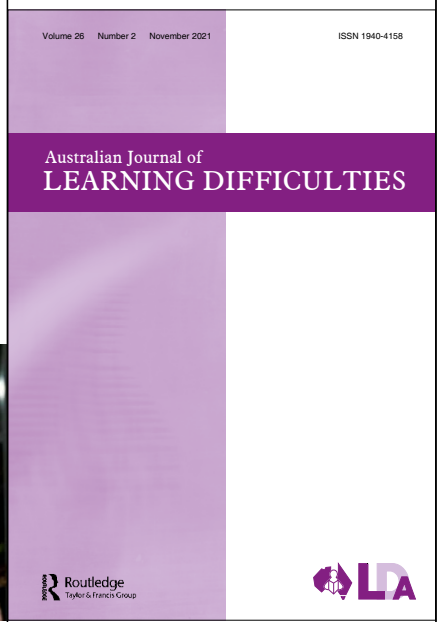
When asked to provide a comment on her four years as *AJLD* Editor, **Tanya Serry** replied:

> "It has been my great honour and pleasure to be the editor for *AJLD*. Being a pedantic word nerd, avid reader and passionate about all things *literacy*, this really was the perfect job. I also felt it was a win-win as I loved the work but also felt privileged to work with many authors and get a bird's eye view of their research. COVID-19 presented some challenges as reviewers were busy transitioning their entire work practices and review times lagged a bit. Manuscript authors were, however, very generous and understanding when I explained that the reviews were likely to take six weeks (well, maybe eight) instead of the expected four weeks. I will miss the intellectual rigour of this wonderful role and I have been delighted at the calibre of the papers that have been published in my four years as editor. I know that I leave the journal in very safe hands and will be keenly watching the future of this important journal."

The new Editors were also asked for a comment, and **Alison Madelaine** replied:

> "After a break from editing for several years, Kevin Wheldall and I are pleased to be back in the saddle as editors of the *AJLD*. We will be ably assisted by Nicola Bell as Assistant Editor. We would like to carry on the great work of the past few editors and bring high quality empirical research and other research-based content on teaching those with learning difficulties to Australian educators."





LDA is very proud to be associated with this publication. The *AJLD* has a very strong Editorial Board, and the articles that it accepts for publication make a substantial contribution to the science of reading. Access to the *AJLD* is a major benefit of LDA membership.

Information about the aims and scope of the AJLD, and its early history, can be found on the LDA website at *https://www.ldaustralia.org/the-australian-journal-of-learning-difficulties/*

On behalf of all LDA members, LDA Council extends a vote of appreciation and congratulations to past and present AJLD Editors.

LDA Awards 2021

It is always very pleasing to have the chance to celebrate the work of our colleagues. The LDA September AGM provided the opportunity to do just this, and six awards were presented. Four of these were LDA awards, with nominations received from members of LDA and determined by the LDA Awards Committee. Two were *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties (AJLD)* Awards, funded by Taylor & Francis, the publishers of the *AJLD*, and determined by the Editors of the *AJLD*.

Dr. Nicole Todd, Convenor of the Awards committee, introduced the award recipients. Nicole's introductory comments are summarised here, along with brief responses from the recipients. The recipients of the Eminent Researcher Award and the Mona Tobias Award were also invited to give longer presentations on a topic of their choice to the AGM, and their presentations are summarised on pages 10 to 12 of this Bulletin.

Mona Tobias Award

The Mona Tobias Award is presented by LDA in recognition of an outstanding contribution to the field of learning difficulties in Australia. This contribution may be in the area of leadership, research, practice or teacher and community education.

The recipient of the 2021 Mona Tobias Award was **Emeritus Professor Tom Nicholson**.

Tom Nicholson has made contributions to the field of literacy and learning difficulties that span several decades and several continents. His Ph.D. research, carried out at the University of Minnesota, provided crucial evidence about the importance of accurate decoding. This was very timely data, published in an educational context where Whole Language assumptions held sway. Tom was inducted into the *Reading Hall of Fame* in 2010. His continued professional work, based at the University of Auckland and Massey University, has involved teacher education, research, and research supervision. He has spoken at international conferences, been a visiting professor in a range of countries, and he serves on many editorial boards. He has also directed and tutored in summer schools and

an after-school reading clinic. Tom has hundreds of publications to his name, and has written and co-authored seminal books on phonics, dyslexia, reading comprehension and writing. Tom has consistently provided the teaching world with practical and evidence-based information and strategies.

Tom is also very much appreciated and admired within LDA for his continued support for the LDA Bulletin. He has supplied several articles, edited the whole Autumn 2019 Bulletin, and has been a diligent and creative co-editor for several years, contributing useful ideas, suggestions, and excellent proofreading skills – all done with the wisdom of experience and good humour. As a co-editor, his emphasis has always been to make sure that the Bulletin is as useful as possible for teachers.

In accepting the award, Tom Nicholson thanked LDA for the recognition of his efforts, and presented the meeting with an entertaining and thought-provoking speech, which he has summarised for the Bulletin (see page 11), in a piece retrospectively titled *Phonics – the greatest comeback in reading history: My part in its return*. The title of Tom's summary gives a whimsical nod to Spike Milligan's *Adolf Hitler – My part in his downfall*. This title does, however, go beyond humour; establishing a role for phonics in education has been something of a battle, and Tom has earned great respect as a warrior in the Reading Wars.

Bruce Wicking Award

The Bruce Wicking Award allows LDA to recognise an individual or organisation for innovative programs or practices relating to the teaching of children with learning difficulties.

The recipient of the 2021 Bruce Wicking award was **Alison McMurtrie**.

Alison has devoted her professional life to the support of children who have learning difficulties. Alison has worked as a teacher in South Africa, the U.K. and Australia, and has been a consultant to several important committees. Her recent professional commitment involves a key role with *MultiLit*, where, in her role as Product Development Manager, she has set an exceptionally high standard for the writing of literacy

programs based on scientific evidence. Her contribution has also involved designing and presenting teacher training programs, carrying out research to evaluate the literacy programs, and mentoring teaching teams in schools. Colleagues have always commented that Alison is a willing and kind mentor.

Alison completed a Master of Special Education at Macquarie University in 2012, and has presented at conferences for DSF (Dyslexia SPELD Foundation - Perth), The Reading League (USA), and the Sharing Best Practice: Literacy and Numeracy Conference (Melbourne).

Alison served in a volunteer capacity with LDA as the organisation's Honorary Secretary for the years 2012-2016, as well as being a member of the Professional Development Committee, the Publications Committee, and the Administration Committee.

Alison's contributions to the field of literacy education and to LDA have been very much appreciated.

In response, Alison McMurtrie acknowledged all those colleagues who had helped her on her career path, commenting that it has always been a team effort. She remarked that this is an exciting time to be involved in literacy education. She has noticed tremendous change over the past ten years, with evidence-based teaching practices becoming more accepted in schools, and she derives much satisfaction in hearing from teachers about how their change in practice has helped their students. Judging by the nods on the Zoom screen, this was an observation that resonated with all those present at the AGM.

Rosemary Carter Award

The Rosemary Carter Award is presented to an outstanding LDA Consultant Member who has contributed to the field of learning difficulties through work with students, their advocacy for students and their families, and through education of the wider community.

The recipient of the 2021 Rosemary Carter award was **Diane Barwood**.

Diane has put many years of work into the field of learning difficulties, working in mainstream and special education settings, as classroom teacher, special education teacher, principal of a primary school, and networking with associations in the broader community. Diane joined LDA in 1975, and was awarded life membership of LDA in 2015 in recognition of her contributions to the association. She has served in several positions on Council, including LDA President, and has demonstrated exceptional commitment to, and influence within, the consultant arm of LDA. She is greatly respected for her robust commitment to evidence-based teaching through the professional development she has offered, as well as through her own teaching practice. Diane's nomination was accompanied by several testimonials of appreciation from network colleagues and parents of students she has worked with.

In response, Diane thanked all her colleagues and the parents who had supported her nomination for this award, and acknowledged the outstanding professional collegiality that is shared within the group of LDA Consultants. She said that has found the time she has devoted to LDA to be rewarding, and commented that one of the most rewarding of these LDA experiences was working with Rosemary Carter, in whose honour this annual award is presented.

Tertiary Student Award

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

The recipient of the 2021 LDA Tertiary Student Award was **Reid Smith**.

Reid is the Head of Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction at Clarendon College, Ballarat, and has gained great respect for his efforts to embed evidence-based practices into classroom teaching. He is also a member of the SOLAR Lab at La Trobe University, where he is enrolled in a PhD.

He was the lead author of an article published together with his supervisors, Pamela Snow, Tanya Serry and Lorraine Hammond, in *Reading Psychology* 2021, 42(3), 214-240, The Role of Background Knowledge in Reading Comprehension: A Critical Review. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02702711.2021.1888348

In accepting the award, Reid thanked his supervisors for their expertise and support, thanked LDA for the recognition of this work, and expressed the hope that his research will be of use to students and teachers in the future.

Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties Eminent Researcher Award

The 2021 *AJLD* Eminent Researcher Award, which is awarded by invitation of the Editor of the Journal, was presented to **Professor Genevieve McArthur**. The award was announced by Roslyn Neilson on behalf of Tanya Serry, Editor of the AJLD.

Genevieve McArthur, Professor of Cognitive Science at Macquarie University, has been a well-respected researcher in the field of literacy for many years, with a very impressive history of publications, research grants, and service on editorial boards. She is currently the Translational Director of the *Macquarie University Centre of Reading*, the Founding Director of the *Macquarie University Reading Clinic*, and the Project Manager of *MOTIf* (Macquarie Online Test Interface; *www.motif.org.au*). She describes the goal of her research as "to understand what causes reading and language difficulties in children, how these difficulties can be identified and treated effectively, and how they relate to emotional health." Genevieve also says

that she is a "passionate advocate for the rapid translation of evidence-based knowledge into practice" – a goal that is absolutely in harmony with the mission of LDA.

A summary of Genevieve's acceptance speech is presented on page 10.

Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties Early Career Researcher Award

The *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties* Early Career Researcher Award is based on the submission of a paper appropriate for publication in the *AJLD* by a researcher who has completed a Ph.D. within the last six years and who is currently engaged in research which has the potential to make a significant contribution to theory or practice in the learning difficulties area.

The recipient of the 2021 *AJLD* Early Career Researcher Award was **Dr. Sally Robinson-Kooi**.

The paper submitted for this Award was an article published in the *AJLD* in 2020 on the topic *Using sentence dictation to practise and assess taught spelling and punctuation skills: A Year 2 explicit instruction intervention*. Sally continues to be engaged in research that has the potential to make a significant contribution to theory and classroom practice in supporting students with learning difficulties and students who speak English as an additional language or dialect.

In accepting her award, Sally thanked Lorraine Hammond and Lin Meeks for their support, and dedicated the award to all students who may struggle without the benefit of explicit teaching.

LDA Awards: Celebrating our professional colleagues

- Would you like to see formal recognition of a colleague who has a career history that involves valuable contributions to the area of learning and learning difficulties through research and practice, innovative programs or excellent work as an LDA Consultant? The LDA **Mona Tobias**, **Bruce Wicking** and **Rosemary Carter** Awards, named in honour of our predecessors in the field, are all designed for this purpose.
- Would you like to celebrate a university student who is doing excellent research and producing publications in the area of literacy or learning difficulties? Let them know that they can apply for the **LDA Tertiary Student Award**.
- Would you like to see special recognition of a researcher in the field who is still in the early stages of their career? The publishers of LDA's *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties* (AJLD), Taylor & Francis, provide a generous and prestigious **Early Career Researcher Award** to recognise research which has the potential to make a significant contribution to theory or practice in the learning difficulties area. This Award is based on an article submitted for publication in the AJLD. If you know researchers who have recently completed their PhD and are continuing to work in research relating to learning and learning interventions, you can inform them about this opportunity.
- Would you like to have the chance to applaud a successful researcher whose work has made an important difference to you in your own career supporting children with learning difficulties? Taylor & Francis have available a generous **Eminent Researcher Award**, awarded by invitation of the AJLD Editor/s. Acceptance of the award involves the submission of an article to the AJLD, and these articles always provide an excellent bonus for the readers of the journal. Please contact LDA if you would like to put forward a suggestion for an eminent researcher who you would like to see considered for this award.

Recipients are presented with their awards at the LDA Annual General Meeting.

Criteria and nomination procedures for all the awards, and lists of previous recipients, are available on the LDA website. See *https://www.ldaustralia.org/about/awards/*

All nominations for the 2022 awards are due in by the end of May 2022. Contact enquiries@ldaustralia.org if you would like more information.

Evidence-based interventions for reading: Reflections on the past, the present and the future(?)

The 2021 LDA Eminent Researcher Award, sponsored by Taylor & Francis, the publishers of the Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties, was presented to Prof. Genevieve McArthur. The presentation Genevieve provided as award recipient has been summarised by Ros Neilson (Genevieve has kindly confirmed that the summary did not contain too many errors).

Genevieve McArthur's presentation to the LDA AGM provided a challenging and thought-provoking reflection on the progress we are making as educators and scientists who are concerned with reading.

Genevieve began by inviting us to join her in a time-travel Tardis, first going back to the 1990s and then moving forward to the 2000s. She reminded us of two well-aired hypotheses about faulty brain wiring and reading difficulties that were current at those times, and she spelled out the trajectory of those hypotheses and the associated commercial products that were developed and promoted as interventions. In the 1990s the concept of low-level auditory processing deficits in poor readers spawned the *FastForWord* program, and the cerebellar deficit hypothesis of the 2000s was associated with the *DORE* program. These two hypotheses followed similar trajectories: they started with a theory that received some scientific attention, and although the initial experimental results were mixed, they were immediately translated into commercial products. While the companies promoting the products continued to provide testimonial evidence to support their use, reading scientists became increasingly concerned, providing warnings that there was no supporting evidence at all. Eventually both those products were removed from public use. Genevieve reminded us that these were only two examples of many programs that are designed to help children with reading difficulties by addressing an assumed 'distal' cause of their problems rather than by directly teaching the children to read – programs that tend to follow an unfortunate trajectory.

Genevieve's Tardis then took us forward to around 2010, and she pointed out that an interesting shift seemed to be happening at this stage. Instead of focussing on distal causes of reading difficulties, many practitioners were focussing on the reading process itself, and how reading might be taught. She pointed to a plethora of commercial and non-commercial programs that provided their own systems of reading instruction. She welcomed this shift, pointing out that the theory behind the effectiveness of direct intervention on reading is much stronger than the theory behind treating the problem indirectly.

Realistically, however, Genevieve reminded us that despite this promising shift there are still problems in the area of literacy acquisition – there are still children struggling with reading, and teachers unsure about literacy programs. She wondered whether the move towards direct teaching of reading that became evident in about the 2010s was in danger of following the same trajectory that we had seen in our earlier time travels. What, she challenged us to ask ourselves, might go wrong? And can we accelerate our progress?

Genevieve pointed out that we know that reading is complex, with multiple skills involved, and that problems might occur with any one or more of the skills. We also know that targeted explicit instruction is effective. We are somewhat less sure, however, about how the different skills are best identified, and which interventions are the most effective.

This means that there are two clear directions in which we might find it useful to focus efforts: making assessment more straightforward and practicable in the classroom, so that teachers can identify the reading skills that need to be targeted; and systematically exploring the details of the effectiveness of interventions, in terms of scope, sequence, rate, intensity, group size, order of intervention, etc. There is much research still to be done.

In order to carry out this research effectively, however, collaboration is needed between scientists and

practitioners. Co-designing at all levels is essential as programs are developed and evaluated.

Genevieve suggested that at this stage it might be useful to think about the relationship between theory and practice, and to take the role of theory very seriously indeed. Reading intervention programs are constrained by a host of external factors that limit their sustainability – funding considerations and intellectual property being the most obvious of these.

The situation is different, however, for scientific theory – there are no limitations or constraints on how people can access and understand theories. Theory, Genevieve suggested, has the potential to act as a shield that can allow current intervention programs to follow a different trajectory from the hapless interventions with which she began the discussion. What is needed, therefore, is the development of strong theories about how each of the proximal skills involved in reading should be trained. As Genevieve put it, "Theories allow us to put the translation of science to practice on steroids."

The advantage of having a strong theory as the basis of intervention practice is that the theory can be translated into practice that suits the contexts in which the teachers and clinicians are working. If practitioners are armed with a strong theory that accounts for the proximal skills in reading, they can make informed choices and adapt their intervention practice to allow, for example, for differences in ages, group sizes, financial constraints, locations, and the people delivering the intervention.

Comment from Ros Neilson: LDA certainly looks forward to continuing support from Genevieve and her team in the science of translating research to practice. This is a very well-deserved Eminent Researcher Award!

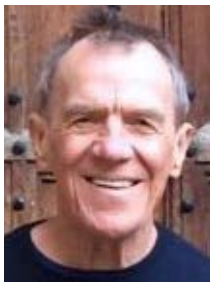
Genevieve McArthur is Professor of Cognitive Science at Macquarie University, Translational Director at Macquarie University Centre for Reading, Founding Director of Macquarie University Reading Clinic, and Founder and Project Manager of MOTIF.

Phonics – The greatest comeback in reading history: My part in its return

Tom Nicholson has provided a summary of the acceptance speech that he gave at the LDA 2021 AGM in acceptance of the Mona Tobias Award. His speech provided informal reminiscences of a period that was in fact crucially important in educational history.

First, some history about me. I was born in Sydney. I went to school in the western suburbs, and to Sydney University. My first proper job was at Bonnyrigg High School teaching English and History. Reading difficulties confronted me almost from my first day, when I had a year 9 class for English. Everything I learned at Teachers College went out the window. When I asked students to read from the textbook many could not pronounce the words. The curriculum included *Macbeth* and *Huckleberry Finn*, but they were struggling to read the words.

I had done a whole year of teacher training, and no one had ever mentioned that there might be students who could not read. My students were on a road to nowhere and they did not care what happened to them. They loved to make life difficult for me, probably because reading was something they feared. To avoid chaos, I arrived early for class and started feverishly writing on the board –then when the class arrived, I asked them to copy my notes into their books. This kept them quiet most of the time. It was not a good solution. The reading issues puzzled me – had I missed something in my training?



I went back to Sydney Teachers College to their library to find books on teaching reading, but I could not find any – except a book by Fred Schonell called *Backwardness in the Basic Subjects*. Re-reading it now, it was a book well ahead of its time. It argued that teachers have to become their own educational psychologists and deal with reading difficulties themselves, rather than expect others to do the job for them.

Thankfully, it is a different world today. There is now so much helpful information on the internet – though I am not sure if today's high school teachers know any more about reading. I hope so.

A problem with the internet is to separate the wheat from the chaff. There are some online snake charmers and occasional carpetbaggers. But they will not last – the science of reading points us in the right direction.

After five years of teaching, I landed in the Research and Planning Branch of the Education Department of South Australia. The director Noel Wilson, asked me to write something for teachers on reading, "Find out what the reading problems are

and give teachers two or three solutions for each." Over the next six months, I digested everything I could on reading. The book I wrote went out to all schools. It was rewarding when teachers told me they kept their copy wrapped in brown paper so that others would not steal it.

My Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota was about reading errors and their effect on comprehension. My results indicated that if you want to achieve good comprehension, you have to be accurate, making as few mistakes as possible. Context will not save you. If the child read, "I found monkeys on the road" instead of "I found money on the road" or "The king and queen lived in a cave" instead of "lived in a castle", they thought that this was what happened. It was hard to reconcile the results with what Whole Language writers at the time like Ken Goodman and Frank Smith were saying about the power of context.

At Minnesota, there were some funny moments. In a reading difficulties graduate course, the 8-year-old I was tutoring wrote me a note that said, "I do not like the silent e. It is in words I do not like – like elephant and egg." How could I explain to her that those words did not have a "silent e"? I realised that teaching phonics to these children is demanding – you had to know what you were doing.

When I arrived in New Zealand, Whole Language had taken hold. The journey for me was not without scars. For example, in the happy hour at one conference, I said the word "phonics" and people took their glasses of chardonnay and walked away.

At the University of Auckland, we had started to do summer school teaching. I had the idea to offer an undergraduate summer course on reading problems and base it at a local primary school. The parents loved it. One parent said their daughter had "gone from a zero to a hero". We had grandmas sitting outside the classroom waiting for their little ones. The children's brothers, sisters, and cousins peered through the windows, wanting to be part of the programme. One parent donated $100 of McDonalds hamburgers and chips for the end of course party.

Our diagnostics said that just about every child who attended the summer school needed phonics. We taught the pyramid of phonics – the layers of English, from Anglo-Saxon words, to Latin, and Greek. I think it is crucial to explain the pyramid of English to pupils. It helps them to understand the logic of phonics. It makes sense of a lot of things that seem strange to them like why "ch" has a "ch" sound for some words and a "k" sound for others and a "sh" sound for others – it is all about the difference between the layers. Teaching about the layers of English de-mystifies English spelling.

I think for trainee teachers, the experience of tutoring a student who is having difficulty should be compulsory. It is a real learning opportunity, and you gain so many useful skills. Very often, you think you have the answers, but the student is not buying into your great ideas. When this happens, you realise that teaching reading is not a cakewalk – but it is a rewarding challenge. When a student who can barely read a text to you asks if they can show their decodable books to their friends at their birthday party, it melts your heart. Like Mona Tobias, you feel that you just have to keep helping them if you can.

The reading wars are over now –- it is a brave new world – yet we have to keep nudging; phonics still struggles to gain a foothold in many schools. We need to continue helping the reading casualties of the system. Parents are our best allies, but many feel lost and confused about what to do so they give up.

In some low-SES schools, only 40 percent of students are full attenders. It is as if their parents know things will not end well, that the Gods want their children to fail. We should never give up on these children. We must believe that with the right instruction we can help everyone to read and succeed. I think that is what LDA is all about – how to make this happen.

Emeritus Professor Tom Nicholson is a freelance writer who also enjoys dabbling in urban sketching. He has not quite renounced his previous life, which was as an author, researcher, literacy tutor, and professor teaching literacy education at the University of Auckland and Massey University, New Zealand.

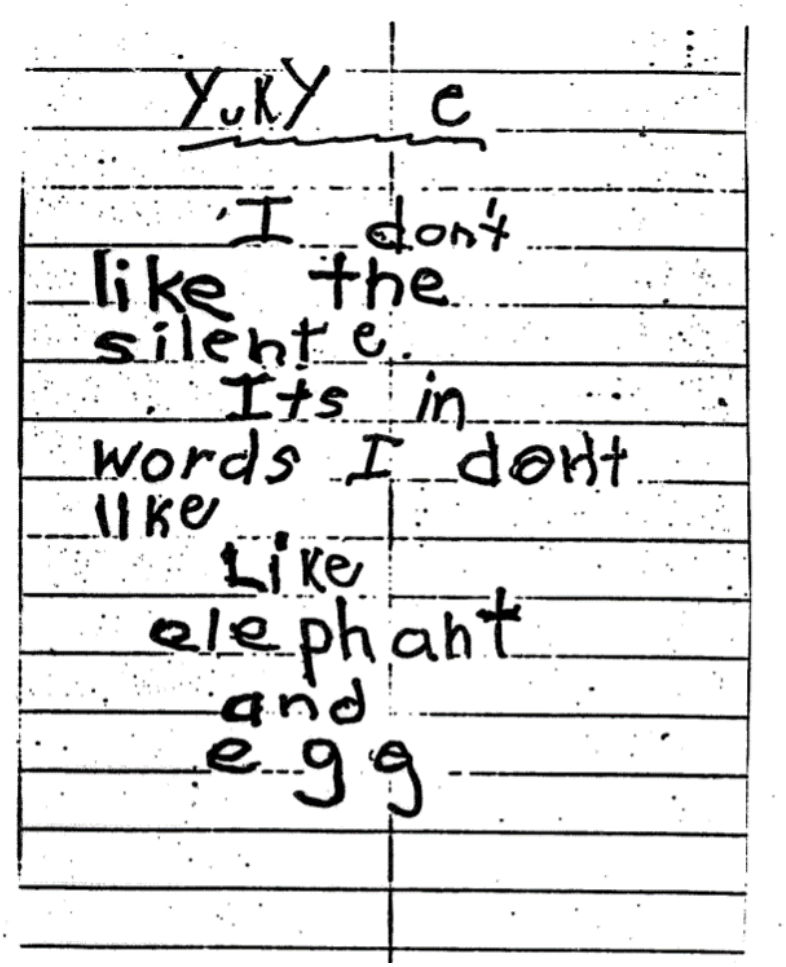


Figure 1. Teaching phonics is demanding!

In this issue of the Bulletin...

Ros Neilson, Editor, LDA Bulletin

The first section of this issue of the LDA Bulletin, containing the LDA-related news, includes not only a message from the new President, warm congratulations to LDA Award winners, a welcome to the new *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties* Editors, and regular Consultant Notes, but also information about what has been a major change at the Council level of the association. Almost all the Council members and the General Manager stepped down at or before the AGM in September 2021, and the association now has an almost entirely new set of Council members. It is in fact this change that inspired the choice of the theme for the second part of this issue of the LDA Bulletin: the concept of multi-tiered levels of support for students.

By way of explanation of this choice: At the heart of the recent changes that have taken place in LDA Council lies a debate that has over the past couple of years evoked strong feelings within membership as well as amongst the Council members: the debate about whether or not the name 'Learning Difficulties Australia' should be changed as part of a growth strategy for the association. Those wanting to change the name would have preferred a name that included the words 'effective teaching' and/or 'science' – a name that did not include the words 'learning difficulties.' A formal debate about the issue took place at the June 2021 Special General Meeting that was called to vote on several changes, including this name change. One speaker who argued in favour of the name change began with the generally accepted assumption that it is important for LDA to reach out to the increasing number of mainstream classroom teachers who want to learn more about explicit teaching. This speaker commented that there tended to be a change in the atmosphere of professional development workshops for mainstream teachers whenever the term 'learning difficulties' was used – she felt that a focus on learning difficulties turned teachers away. Speakers on the other side of the debate, arguing against a name change, were concerned that, despite the wave of enthusiasm to promote what is generally agreed as best practice in literacy teaching, the reality remains that there are individual differences in the levels of support that students require in the learning environment. Even best teaching practice in the mainstream classroom doesn't immediately solve all the challenges, although it should minimise the prevalence of the challenges. It was argued that all teachers need to be aware of students who need more support, and need to know how to make appropriate adjustments in the classroom. Furthermore, all schools need to have in place a system that ensures that safety nets are in place. Speakers who did not want LDA's name changed argued that 'learning difficulties' is not a word to be avoided, and to change the name and the focus of Learning Difficulties Australia would risk casting the association adrift from its important historical roots.

As the Council News section in this Bulletin reports, the outcome was that, despite the strong recommendations of many of the members of Council at the Special General Meeting, the majority of LDA members who attended the meeting voted 'NO' to the name change. Our name is still 'Learning Difficulties Australia'.

Those individuals who had nominated to stand for the incoming Council and those who were appointed at the AGM continued this important debate amongst themselves, trying to articulate a middle ground where best practice in the mainstream classroom is not separated from a deep understanding of learning difficulties. The additional new Council members who have joined since the AGM have contributed substantially to the debate. As Editor of the Bulletin in the midst of all this, I felt that an LDA Bulletin issue devoted to multi-tiered systems of support for all students seemed to be a timely move.

The topic of multi-tiered support systems in schools is introduced by three Australian experts in the field - contributors who are academics as well as teachers: Dr Kate de Bruin (one of our new council members), Emina McLean, and Karina Stocker. Kate begins with a historical introduction to tiered support systems, and she and Karina then go on to discuss the implementation of these models, with a focus on the secondary level. Emina, writing from the experience of someone who is herself driving the whole-scale adoption of a tiered support system in a primary school, provides useful specific details of how such a system is ideally implemented. Their contributions are followed by a cautionary note from Cathryn Bjarnesen, an educational consultant in New Zealand, and Roslyn Neilson, who argue that if there is no external evaluation of the system to complement the checks and balances within the system, multi-tiered support models may appear to be working but may still be ineffective. They provide a case study to document the potential problem.

The MultiLit team of Kevin and Robyn Wheldall, with due disclosure of commercial interests, contribute a behind-the-scenes account of how their suite of programs has had to evolve to ensure that there is continuity between Level 1 and Level 2 early literacy teaching.

Dr Linda Siegel invites Bulletin readers into the Educational Psychologists' room. Her argument returns to one of the problems that originally led to the development of multi-tiered support systems: the unhelpful requirement that psychologists assess students' IQs to determine whether they can be classified as having learning difficulties and are eligible for support. Her recommendations for re-imagining the role of school psychologists complements and enriches the possibilities of a multi-tiered support system.

These articles on best practice for supporting all students are followed by what provides probably the most powerful argument in the whole issue of this Bulletin. It comes from the voices of parents. Sarah Gole, Jacqui Tarquino and Olivia Connelly provide data from a Victorian survey of parents of children with learning difficulties. They document the experiences they and their children have had in the school system, and in doing so they show how urgent the need is for adequate systems of support in the school system. Their submission to this issue finishes with a request for Bulletin readers to sign a petition that they have organised to present to the Victoria Department of Education, recommending the introduction of a Phonics Screening Check in Victoria, as has been occurring in many other parts of the world.

This issue ends not with the usual book review but rather with an important comment that follows on from the extensive book review that was published in the previous LDA *Bulletin*, Wendy Moore's discussion of Wes Hoover and Bill Tunmer's (2020) book, *The Cognitive Architecture of Reading*. In this issue, Wes Hoover and Bill Tunmer respond carefully to serious criticisms that have been levelled against the Simple View of Reading in the literature, arguing that the simple model still serves the implementation of the science of reading very well indeed.

We hope you enjoy reading the articles in this LDA Bulletin, and we invite you to join in with letters of comment to *bulletin.editor@ldaustralia.org*.

Thanks very much to the Bulletin Editorial team for their help in preparing this issue, and special thanks to the contributors.

Dr Roslyn Neilson
Editor, LDA Bulletin

Response to Intervention (RTI) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS): An Introduction

Kate de Bruin introduces the series of articles about tiered levels of support with an historical explanation of how and why the concept developed in the American context, and a discussion of how the approach might meet current needs in Australian schools.

When I was a high-school English teacher, I was part of a group of teachers who set out to address the issue we had identified amongst a number of our students: they couldn't read. Although we weren't trained in reading instruction, we could see that without being able to read, these students were doomed to fail high school. So, we enrolled in professional learning, lobbied for resourcing, and got ourselves trained to run a commercial program with clear evidence to support its use with teenagers. Armed with these, we set about systematically identifying and teaching every student to read.

The students we taught were diverse. Some of the students in our first 'intake' were students with long disciplinary records, on the fast-track to expulsion. Others were refugees, traumatised and with patchy primary-school education, or were instructional casualties of the 'reading wars' playing out in Melbourne's primary schools. A few had disabilities such as dyslexia, hearing impairment or had intellectual disabilities. The students ranged all the way up to year ten but what they shared was that they were reading at about a grade two level.

We taught them all to read, without a single exception. We also sought to change the belief of many of our colleagues who felt that these students couldn't learn, that the students 'didn't belong here', that they would be better off leaving, or that they had to go to a special school to get an education. We persuaded them that we could teach them all, that they were our students, that they deserved a place in their local high school, that they had the same right to be educated at that school as their siblings and peers. We talked a lot about equity and held up our success stories and some of our star students as examples of our school's greatest achievements.

After teaching that first group, from whom we also learned so much, we set up a system so that all students transitioning from the local feeder schools were screened in the term before their arrival. Four years after setting it up, we had run six cycles of students through that programme. But the non-readers kept coming up from the primary schools. It took me years to ask why. Twenty years later, I teach pre-service and postgraduate students the answers I have since learned to that question of 'why'. Many of these answers are explored in depth in the subsequent articles in this issue of the LDA *Bulletin* on 'levels of support'. The concept of levelled support is grounded in multi-tiered frameworks such as Response to Intervention (RTI). In this introduction, I tell the story of how RTI came to be developed in the United States (US) as a means of de-segregating the school system for students with disabilities and providing effective universal instruction for every student, as well as timely intervention on the basis of need.

What did we do before RTI?

The process of delivering educational support services to students experiencing difficulties at school has historically relied on understanding disability through a 'medical' lens both in the US (Sailor et al., 2018) and also Australia (de Bruin et al., 2020). This meant that any prolonged difficulties in learning or behaviour experienced by students is attributed to a deficit, disability or impairment *within the student themselves*. When difficulties at school are viewed this way, the accessibility and quality of regular instruction are not considered as contributing factors. Rather, students who share a diagnostic category are assumed to share a need for specially designed instructional practices matched to their disability or deficit. Accordingly, they are often grouped in separate 'special' settings away from their peers in general education for the purposes of efficiently delivering these 'special' practices. To determine students' eligibility for special educational services they are typically referred to medical and allied health professionals such as psychologists for assessment and diagnosis. The category of a student's diagnosis (e.g., intellectual disability, developmental disability, learning disability) is then used to determine the funding for educational services (Ysseldyke et al, 1999), and many unfunded students go without support.

How did we decide who needed special educational services?

The categorical approach for funding and service delivery of special education was developed in the United States in the 1970s, when two *key civil rights cases* prompted reforms of federal education legislation. These court cases drew on a previous legal precedent that determined 'separate is not equal' and triggered the racial de-segregation of public schooling in the US. Applied to students with disability, this precedent meant that under the newly-reformed Federal education law, *all* students were able to access a quality education within the regular school system (Ysseldyke, 1999). This reform was ground-breaking on many fronts, but most notably in legislating for the right of students with disabilities to be educated when so many had previously been excluded or institutionalised. It also broke new ground by recognising the category of 'learning disability' for the first time.

What was so wrong with that model?

While well-intentioned, the categorical funding and service delivery approach in the US did not result in improved instruction and achievement for students with disabilities within general education classrooms. Indeed, the effect was in fact rather the reverse, because there was more attention paid to administering the evaluation process than there was to the quality of instruction provided to students (Sailor, 2002). The evaluation process contained an inadvertent incentive to have students diagnosed in order to access funded services, as well as profit to be made from conducting the diagnostic process itself in the newly-expanding fields of psychological and psychoeducational testing (Germann, 2010; Sailor et al, 2018). These incentives resulted in ever-more students being pulled out of the general education classroom; few ever returned (Chard, 2013). Thus, instead of improving the access of students with disability to a quality education within general education classrooms, the economic incentives within the new system of assessing entitlement fuelled a new and different but socially sanctioned form of segregation: the separate special education classroom.

During the 1980s, concerns were raised regarding the rapid expansion of students identified with learning difficulties/disabilities and behavioural difficulties/disabilities. Particular criticism was made about the IQ-achievement *discrepancy model* using gaps between students actual and expected achievement as a basis for diagnosis of learning disability which was viewed as an unreliable process (Pullen et al, 2018). There were additional concerns that these

processes required a 'wait to fail' model whereby a diagnosis could only be made once students' academic achievement or behaviour were substantially below that of their same-age peers. This meant that students who genuinely needed support often went without that support for years, by which time underachievement or behavioural concerns were often extensive and more difficult to address.

How did this lead to RTI?

In response to these concerns, in 2003 the US Federal Government set up six research centres to investigate the potential of multi-tiered prevention models to improve reading and behaviour outcomes of students (Chard, 2013). Multi-tier models originate from public health, in which primary tier practices are promoted across the population to prevent disease, such as healthy eating and regular exercise. For some individuals, secondary and tertiary tiers of intervention are then provided in response to acute and chronic health conditions that are implemented on a scale of intensity depending on individual responses to treatment which are carefully monitored.

Recast in the world of education rather than public health, multi-tier models were examined in relation to: coordinated tiers of instruction and intervention; data for universal screening and progress monitoring; evidence-based practices for instruction and intervention; professional learning; and school improvement (Chard, 2013). These were examined by researchers in application to two lines of inquiry: reading and behaviour. Research at the University of Oregon drew on this approach to develop a tiered framework of practices for proactively teaching and responding to student behaviour (Sailor et al, 2018). This work established a collaborative model for raising the intensity of behavioural instruction for students when Tier 1 quality teaching was not sufficient. This was achieved by engaging in school-based problem-solving and decision-making to identify the most appropriate strategies to change the teaching and learning environment and address underlying causes and functions of unwanted student behaviour (Fletcher et al., 2018). The research ultimately resulted in the framework known as Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) or School-wide Positive Behaviour Interventions and Support (SWPBS) among other variations.

At the same time, research at Vanderbilt University and the University of Kansas drew on the multi-tier model to develop a more rigorous approach for determining student eligibility to access special educational services under the category of learning disabilities (Sailor et al., 2018). This work sought to understand how students' responses to effective instruction in the general education classroom might permit more accurate identification of students needing supplementary support (Bradley et al., 2007). This research focused most strongly on the area of reading and produced particularly valuable standardised protocols in screening and progress monitoring, as well as the use of evidence-based instruction and intervention, ultimately becoming the model we know today as Response to Intervention, or RTI. This early work on RTI was conducted by academics interested in reading, and much of it took place at the time leading up to and following the report of the National Reading Panel (NRP; 2000). Given these factors, it is easy to see why RTI research relates predominantly to learning and achieving in reading. In light of its emphasis on intervening early, it is also easy to see why the majority of existing research has focused on RTI in primary schools with the majority of evidence relating to this area to date.

So, what is RTI?

RTI operates as a multi-tiered model of service delivery in which students are provided with high-quality academic instruction and intervention. It uses student achievement data instead of a categorical funding model to determine student eligibility for more targeted educational support services. This means that the educational support services available within a school are made available to any student who needs them, rather than being preserved for those who are eligible for funding based on disability diagnosis. The core elements of RTI include:

- the use of evidence-based practices
- a sliding scale of increasingly intensive instruction and intervention across multiple tiers
- the collection of universal screening and progress monitoring data from students
- the use of this data for making educational decisions

Within RTI, all students receive high-quality evidence-based instruction at Tier 1 in the general education classroom. The degree to which they are responding to this instruction and making appropriate progress in Tier 1 is determined by regular screening. When Tier 1 instruction is implemented with fidelity, this should be sufficient to support progress and achievement for the majority (approximately 80%) of students. For students who are not responding sufficiently to Tier 1 instruction, further targeted assessment may be conducted to identify which particular academic skills they might need to learn and rehearse more frequently in increasingly smaller groups at Tier 2. Students who do not respond to Tier 2 are offered support at Tier 3, which tends to be considerably more individualised and intensive, representing a substantial cost in terms of teacher time and school resources. For this reason, Tier 3 should not be implemented until Tier 2 has been implemented with fidelity and provided in a manner that was based on robust assessment data indicating the instructional needs of students. Importantly, Tier 2 and 3 do not replace Tier 1 teaching but are offered in addition to it.

Where to from here?

Both RTI and PBS represent a profound move away from a medical model that views student learning difficulties as a medical issue within the individual. Both approaches presume that all students are capable of learning with the right amount of quality instruction and determines that amount by considering how they respond to foundational Tier 1 instruction in order to provide the appropriate degree of intensified supplementary intervention at Tiers 2 or 3.

Beyond implementing PBS or RTI as discrete models to address academic or behavioural skills, there is now a shift towards implementing these as a cohesive model which incorporates a comprehensive assessment system that routinely collects data on students' academic progress and behaviour and understands that these are related. These are generally known as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) which integrate the collaborative team-based problem-solving approach developed from PBS and the improved decision-making from robust assessment developed within RTI. Not only does the model make sense in terms of combining the technical processes to make a more robust system, it also

understands that academic learning and behaviour are often interlinked. Many of those students I taught all those years ago who could not read misbehaved as a strategy to avoid having to read, or to be exposed as such to their peers. Their behaviours were a direct result of not being able to access the curriculum. Identifying them as needing a no-excuses disciplinary response would never have addressed this. Teaching them to read most certainly did.

What does this mean for Australia?

The rationale and benefits of RTI reforms in the US that were developed against these issues offer a clear set of recommendations for educational reforms in Australia. This includes the lessons about de-segregating the system, which is particularly timely given the focus on improving access to an inclusive education within the ongoing Royal Commission into the Violence, Neglect, Abuse and Exploitation of People with Disabilities, and the neglect constituted by failing to teach children to read. There are clear benefits to Australian students in ensuring that appropriate instruction and intervention are available to any student. Categorical funding models have remained in place since the 1980s in all Australian states and territories, with well-known associated issues relating to categories that are ineligible for funding, such as students with dyslexia (de Bruin, 2020). This has meant that there has been no system-level support for ensuring that all students are able to access targeted support if and when they require it, having instead to 'wait to fail' and hope for the 'right' diagnosis.

In my old school, reading intervention is no longer offered. These days, students who cannot read are now given no support to learn to do so. They fail, they drop out, or they leave to learn 'life skills' at special schools; the lucky ones have parents who can afford to pay for private tuition. With the recent advent of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data for School Students with Disability (NCCD), however, many state education policies and those of other sectors are beginning to shift towards a needs-based approach. This means that the time is ripe in Australia to adopt multi-tiered models and provide support across all systems and sectors for implementation at scale *as is done in the US*. The articles in this issue offer a series of insights into the implementation of RTI including how to set it up at the school level, the role of allied health professionals within an RTI system, and ensuring coordination between the tiers. Those of you who are interested to know more can access a wealth of resources at the following links:

- *https://www.interventioncentral.org/response-to-intervention*
- *http://www.rtinetwork.org/*
- *https://mtss.education/*

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Multi-Tiered Systems of Support: Comparing Implementation in Primary and Secondary Schools

In this article **Kate de Bruin** and **Karina Stocker** explore the implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support in a range of school contexts, with a focus on secondary school.

Background: Multi-tiered systems of support in schools

Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) are school-wide frameworks for delivering effective educational services to all students. They have been developed and refined over the past three decades with the intention of making education more equitable. MTSS frameworks are designed to ensure that all students are provided with a positive and supportive learning environment, where access to evidence-based support is timely and based on individual student need. When implemented with fidelity, MTSS should result in students making good academic and behavioural progress through the use of efficient and effective instructional practices and interventions.

Multi-tiered models were originally developed in order to move away from approaches that assumed that students with disabilities required 'special' teaching strategies to meet a 'special need' based on their disability classification. Evidence from the past few decades has made clear that these are faulty assumptions. Rather, research suggests that all students, without exception, benefit from high-quality and evidence-based teaching strategies used in the general education classroom. This research also indicates that in addition to receiving high-quality teaching within the regular classroom, some students also benefit from receiving carefully targeted intervention delivered in smaller-groups or individually where they can be provided with more frequent and intensive opportunities to acquire and rehearse skills.

There are so many acronyms for multi-tiered models. What is the difference?

Two different types of multi-tier models currently exist in education: one focusing on behaviour (Positive Behaviour Support, variously known by acronyms including PBS, PBIS, SWPBIS) and one focusing on academic skills (Response to Intervention; RTI). However, despite their separate origins, extensive research indicates that the domains of academics and behaviour are strongly interconnected, especially in regards to literacy and externalising behaviour (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). For example, students with poor literacy skills are more likely to engage in unproductive behaviour to escape classroom tasks and are more likely to miss out on academic instruction due to classroom removal (Bohanon et al., 2016). Students may engage in unproductive behaviour as a consequence of being unable to

access the curriculum or participate in learning due to skill deficits or learning disabilities. Research has found that schools often misinterpret student misbehaviour in these situations and apply a disciplinary action rather than providing targeted academic support (Graham et al., 2020). Given the strong links between academic skills and behaviour, and the common elements of both RTI and PBS, many academics and educators now advocate for *an integrated MTSS* that encompasses both academic and behavioural support. Schools implementing a comprehensive MTSS framework are much more likely to consider all aspects of students' learning and behaviour, and accurately identify the most appropriate support required for individual students to make progress.

However, there are also some important distinctions between academic and behavioural learning domains. For example, academics and behaviour involve different skill foci, as well as distinct assessment schedules. Academic skills are tied to the curriculum and involve periodic assessments, whereas social, emotional and behavioural skills are aligned to school expectations and culture, and are more likely to be continually assessed. In recognition of these distinct components and the constraints of

space in this article, we have focused explicitly on how MTSS can be provided for academic skills involved in reading at secondary school. This has traditionally been termed RTI, however, we deliberately choose to use the term MTSS given the strong arguments for an integrated model. In this article, we consider instructional practices, interventions and supports that are evidence-based for use in secondary schools, supporting the best student outcomes in reading. We summarise what is shared and what is distinct in relation to the implementation of MTSS in primary and secondary settings. Further, we discuss some unique issues when implementing MTSS for older students and provide some research-based recommendations.

The fundamentals of MTSS

The MTSS framework is generally characterised by a number of essential core components. These include a sliding scale of increasingly intensive evidence-based instruction and intervention across multiple tiers, the collection of universal screening and progress monitoring data, and the use of this data for making educational decisions. Additionally, for successful implementation of MTSS, research has recommended that schools must continually develop teacher capacity to use these practices with fidelity, and foster effective team-based collaborations, such as data teams (Jimerson et al., 2016). Due to the focus on prevention, early identification and intervention of learning difficulties, the bulk of research on MTSS has been conducted in primary schools. While the evidence base in secondary schools is smaller, it does highlight that there are many fundamental principles and practices that remain consistent across both primary and secondary contexts as well as some key differences. These are discussed in the following sections.

A sliding scale across multiple tiers: Comparing implementation at primary and secondary school

When schools implement an MTSS framework, intervention is systematically organised across three tiers (or levels) of increasingly intensive instructional support that is matched to student need. Importantly, support at higher levels of the framework does not replace core instruction at Tier 1. Rather, intervention is in *addition* to high-quality Tier 1 instruction in order for students to be provided with more frequent and intensive instruction over an extended period of time. This approach is represented below where Student A makes sufficient progress in Tier 1, Student B needs some additional support at Tier 2, and student C requires additional support at Tier 3 (see Figure 1). Each student receives a "slice" accessing as many layers of support as needed and these slices always include Tier 1.

Research indicates that when MTSS frameworks are implemented with fidelity, the majority of students (i.e., approximately 80%) should meet expected performance standards when provided with high-quality, evidence-based Tier 1 instruction (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Further, approximately 15% of students may need more intensive and frequent intervention at Tier 2, and approximately 5% may need even more intensive individualised support at Tier 3 (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). At all tiers, the need for increased levels of support is identified through the consistent, and increasingly frequent, collection of data using universal screening and progress monitoring tools that assess targeted reading skills. However, decisions regarding the timing and need for more intensive support differs between primary and secondary school (this is outlined in more detail below).

Instructional practices for reading: research-based recommendations for primary and secondary school classrooms

Research in primary schools has highlighted several key components to the effective teaching of reading

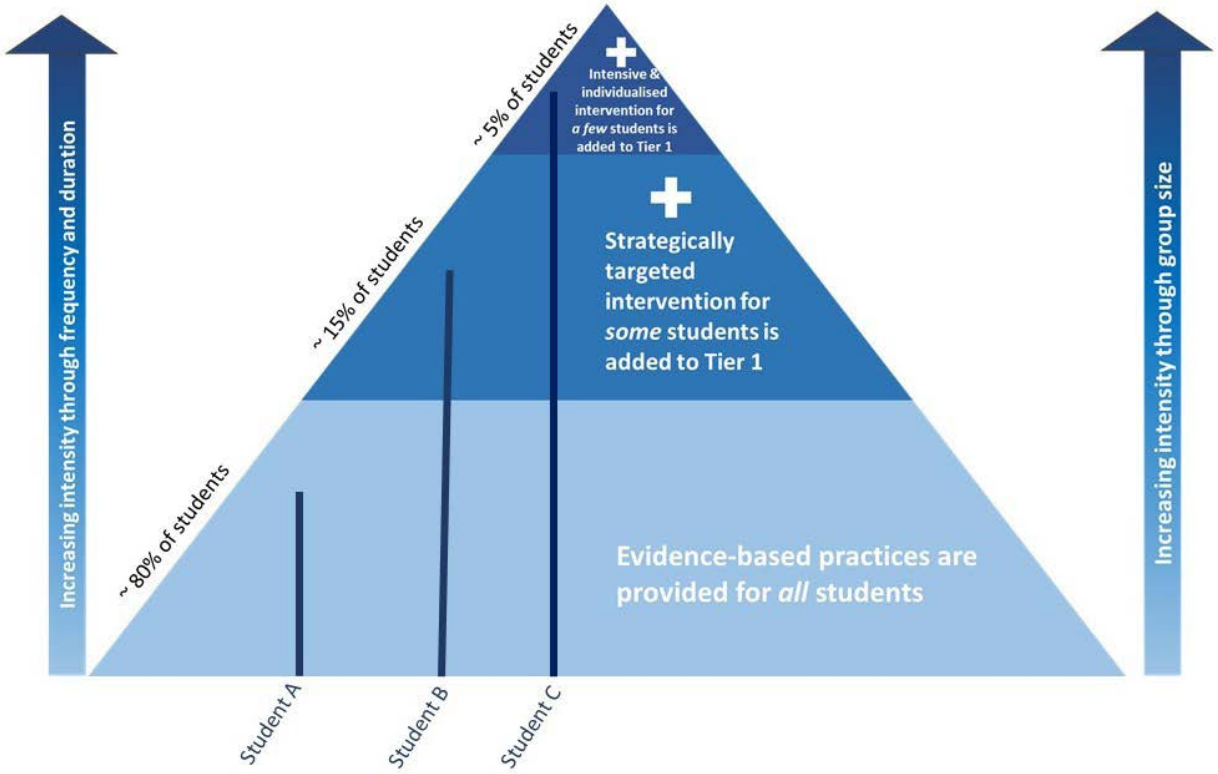

Figure 1. How tiers of support work in an MTSS

at Tier 1. In general, teachers should ensure that students understand the relationship between sound and print, that they practice to the point of fluency, acquire new vocabulary, and learn to self-monitor (Snow et al., 1998). One of the most important elements in primary reading instruction is that the curriculum should be evidence-based, and address all five components identified by the National Reading Panel: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (Denton, 2008). Effective teaching practices include the explicit and systematic teaching of skills and knowledge such as letter-sound correspondences, segmenting and blending as well as conventions for pronunciation e.g., the silent "e" rule. Effective teaching also involves providing lots of opportunities for students to practice applying the skills and strategies taught, spacing the practice, and offering plenty of teacher support and feedback. Teachers should vary the pace of instruction as appropriate to support all students to make progress and re-teach as needed. They should also adjust and adapt both the content and methods of their instruction in response to student achievement data (Denton, 2008).

In secondary schools, the teaching of reading skills takes place across the content areas of the curriculum. Some of the recommendations overlap with those at primary and some are more distinct. For example, explicit teaching, modelling and spaced practice are recommended in application to the different curriculum areas, as is ensuring discipline-related vocabulary is explicitly taught, along with strategies for supporting long-term retention. Recommended strategies for ensuring that students retain discipline-related vocabulary include semantic mapping and *Frayer models*. These are concept maps for building students' conceptual knowledge and disciplinary vocabulary through explicitly defining and contextualising words (see Iris Center, 2021a for examples). Other skills can also be explicitly taught and rehearsed that support student comprehension - skills such as activating prior knowledge, finding the main idea and summarising details from a text (Williams et al., 2018) and using *graphic organisers* (Shinn et al., 2016) to support students in organising and sequencing a large volume of information, such as in planning essays, or demonstrate understand how concepts are related, such as in comprehension tasks (see Iris Center 2021 b for more information). Importantly, the approaches should be used consistently across the school so that students can achieve mastery using these practices in all subject areas.

In primary schools, Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention in reading sub skills is provided at an increasingly greater intensity and frequency during small-group or individual instruction. At Tier 2 sessions should run for approximately four days per week until mastery is achieved. Sessions for Tier 3 intervention should be conducted 5 days a week. In secondary school, the same process for intensifying the frequency of efficient teaching at Tier 2 is still applied. However, it is important that these sessions, and the related materials, are age-appropriate and paired with strategies for engaging and motivating students who have often experienced many years of underachievement (Williams et al., 2018). This highlights the importance of implementing an integrated MTSS framework, as positive learning environments that support the behaviour of students are key to ensuring academic skill acquisition.

There are some structural and workforce-related barriers to implementing MTSS in secondary schools. One is the scheduling of targeted intervention sessions, given the rigidity of timetabling and the lack of a dedicated literacy block. However, it is worth working to find a solution, whether this be offering intervention before school, or negotiating a reduction in the number of a student's subjects to enable them to undertake intervention. Evidence is clear that supplementary reading interventions achieve substantial benefits for older low-progress readers with an average effect size of 0.95 (William et al., 2018). It is never too late to teach students to become better readers, and it is worth overcoming these barriers to find a way to support them.

Another barrier is that many secondary-school teachers are not trained in reading instruction nor in designing or implementing intervention sessions, given that they are largely trained in their specific content areas. Therefore, it may be appropriate for secondary schools to acquire and offer evidence-based programmes that provide instruction in the essential reading skills students need through age-appropriate texts (e.g., non-fiction texts; Shinn et al., 2016). Two programmes that are age-appropriate and evidence-based for older low-progress readers, include the *MacqLit* programme or *Corrective Reading* (de Bruin, 2018). Research on Tier 2 reading interventions with high-school students indicate that while many improve upon the completion of sufficient intervention sessions, some can experience a decline in this impact over time; others can show minimal response to Tier 2 and may need Tier 3 support provided over the long term. This is because it is much harder to close achievement gaps when these have become substantial, and when students may experience difficulties with language, attention or memory retention that can slow their progress (Williams et al., 2018).

Older low-progress readers in secondary school who require Tier 2 support can be well-supported at Tier 1 in the general education classroom through high-quality instructional practices that are already in a teacher's toolkit. It is important to ensure that the "layers" of support are aligned and complement each other. One way is to provide a higher 'dosage' of the elements of explicit instruction. This may include using more concise or simpler instructional language, including more steps in a process, providing more worked examples, activating background knowledge, and planning for more frequent spaced review. Teachers can also provide a more deliberate and slower release of responsibility, by increasing the amount of time spent on teacher modelling (i.e., more "I do" opportunities) and providing more opportunities for guided practice (i.e., more "We do" opportunities) for individuals or small groups of students. When providing more guided practice, teachers can work through a greater number of problems, step-by-step, checking that each step has been executed correctly before moving the student on to independent practice. A teacher or aide may also provide more intensive guidance through increased prompts and prompt fading. Prompts are used to provide students with guidance or support for academic responding during the initial stages of learning. They can be provided visually (e.g., underlining prefixes or suffixes to support polysyllabic word reading), verbally (e.g., repeating a rule or process) or gesturally (e.g., pointing to the next step in a worked example). Prompts should be purposefully increased to support students experiencing difficulties when performing a skill, and strategically

faded as students build fluency and mastery of the required skill.

Teachers can also deliberately increase a student's opportunity to respond (OTR) during classroom instruction. Academic response opportunities can be verbal or nonverbal and can be provided by the teacher, an aide, peers, or via technology within the general classroom environment. Research has indicated that increased OTR can increase a student's academic outcomes, improve their academic engagement (i.e., time-on task), and decrease disruptive behaviours (Sutherland et al., 2002). Delivering greater OTR also allows the teacher to provide timely corrective feedback to students at their individual point of need. Increasing students' OTR can be accomplished using choral responding and response card techniques during whole-class or small-group instruction (e.g., using small whiteboards, blank cards, or pre-printed cards with a range of possible answers).

Peer tutoring is another quality instructional practice that can be used in the general education classroom to supplement and enhance classroom instruction for students requiring Tier 2 support. Teachers can link high achieving students with lower achieving students, with research supporting academic benefits and more positive attitudes towards learning for both the tutor and tutee (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013). Peer tutoring should be used to consolidate learning and allow greater opportunities for students to practice skills and access feedback. It is also important for teachers to provide training and feedback to students to ensure quality interaction during peer tutoring sessions.

Collecting and using student achievement data to make educational decisions about reading

MTSS is characterised by the collection of student achievement data through universal screening and progress monitoring, and the use of this data to drive decision-making regarding higher tiers of support. As mentioned previously, primary schools are recommended to implement universal screening of students' reading skills three times per year (Hughes and Dexter, 2011). The data collected through screening students' phonemic awareness, decoding, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension is then used to understand whether students are making adequate progress within Tier 1 instruction and identify students who may benefit from additional intervention at Tier 2. Recommendations for robust curriculum-based screening tools of basic reading skills can be accessed *here* (see National Center on Intensive Intervention – charts). Schools typically use "cut scores" or percentile ranks from these universal screens to determine which students are performing below benchmarks and eligible for Tier 2 support. Typically, in primary schools, Tier 2 support is reserved for approximately 15% of students. If a high number of students are requiring Tier 2 support (i.e., more than 30% of students), a systematic examination of Tier 1 instructional practices and curricula is undertaken, and instruction improved at that Tier.

In secondary settings, students arrive with their achievement history already well established. This means that there is no need to wait and see whether students respond to Tier 1 reading instruction or to implement a universal screening schedule over a year and monitor those who are underachieving. Rather, existing assessment data should be used in conjunction with any supplemental assessments needed to identify difficulties in basic reading skills and to fast track additional Tier 2 or Tier 3 support (Shinn et al., 2016). This prompt action enables schools to provide more intensive support to the students in greatest need in the timeliest manner possible (Williams et al., 2018). It is recommended that any further screening takes place at the end of an academic year so that interventions can be planned and scheduled for students in the following year, minimising any logistical challenges (Shinn et al., 2016).

In primary schools, where universal screening indicates students are not making adequate progress at Tier 1, progress monitoring should take place more frequently, ideally weekly for 8-12 weeks. This progress monitoring data should be used by teachers to adjust Tier 1 instructional techniques. For example, slow the pace of instruction, re-teach concepts and skills, provide extended opportunities to practice, or provide more individualised feedback in the classroom. If students do not respond to this level of support in Tier 1, then students should be provided with Tier 2 support. Recommendations for progress-monitoring tools can be accessed *here* (see National Center on Intensive Intervention – charts).

In secondary schools, these same principles apply in terms of monitoring students more closely in Tier 1; however, these should be implemented less frequently (Williams et al., 2018). Similarly, students receiving targeted intervention at Tier 2 or intensive intervention at Tier 3, should also have their progress carefully monitored. In both primary and secondary school this should be approximately every 1-4 weeks for students receiving Tier 2 support, and weekly for students receiving Tier 3 support (Shinn et al., 2016).

Conclusion

Strong reading skills are associated with ongoing educational and behavioural success and school completion, as well as long-term life outcomes (e.g., gaining skilled employment). Every student deserves to leave school reading as competently as possible. While the evidence is stronger for implementing MTSS in primary schools, the importance of supporting secondary school students to make progress in reading is clear. It is never too late to teach students to improve their reading and it is vital that schools and teachers never give up on teaching them.

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Designing, implementing, and evaluating the Response to Intervention framework in schools

In this article **Emina McLean**, who is currently engaged in implementing a school-wide tiered support system, outlines essential details about the planning necessary for the successful implementation of this model.

What is the Response to Intervention framework?

The Response to Intervention (RTI) framework is "a practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and applying (student) response data to important educational decisions" (Batsche et al, 2005, p.3). 'Response to *intervention*' is perhaps a misnomer, as the central focus, at least initially, is on the quality of whole class instruction. The primary goal is improved outcomes for all students, while the secondary goal is to identify learning difficulties or disabilities in a timely manner. It is a research based instructional framework that provides "progressively intense instruction" (Hughes & Dexter, 2011, p.4) based on student need. The RTI framework has three tiers which are illustrated and described in Figure 1 below.

The percentage break downs at each tier varies from study to study, but it is commonly estimated that high quality Tier 1 instruction should be sufficient for 80% of students, Tier 2 instruction should meet the needs of a further 15% of students, and the remaining 5% of students are likely to be best served by Tier 3 instruction. It should be noted that a Tier 2 and 3 instruction is provided in addition to Tier 1 (whole class) instruction.

Tier 1 involves delivering high quality curriculum and using evidence-informed instructional methods. Having high expectations for all students is of central importance. Tier 1 is sometimes referred to as primary prevention or proactive support. The overwhelming majority of students should succeed with a well-planned and well-sequenced curriculum and explicit teaching. For example, in early reading, effective Tier 1 instruction can reduce the number of students at risk by 20-25% (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). At Tier 1, universal screening (often referred to as benchmarking) should occur three times per year, with additional progress monitoring assessments for students who struggle.

Tier 2 intervention involves small group instruction, which is sometimes referred to as secondary prevention. It is recommended that groups have three to five students, who receive approximately three thirty-minute sessions per week, with a range of twenty to forty minutes three to five times per week described in the literature. Tier 2 interventions are considered to be an increased dose of Tier 1 instruction, and they are time limited, usually running for ten to twenty weeks.

Tier 3 intervention involves specialist support, which is sometimes referred to as tertiary prevention. It is commonly one-to-one support, but groups may include up to three students. The frequency of support increases again, with recommendations being as high as forty-five to sixty minutes daily in some studies. The support is highly individualised and targeted and usually has an extended duration. This contrasts with Tier 2, which involves an increased dose of whole class instruction, and is time limited.

As students move through the tiers, increased intensity is required to match

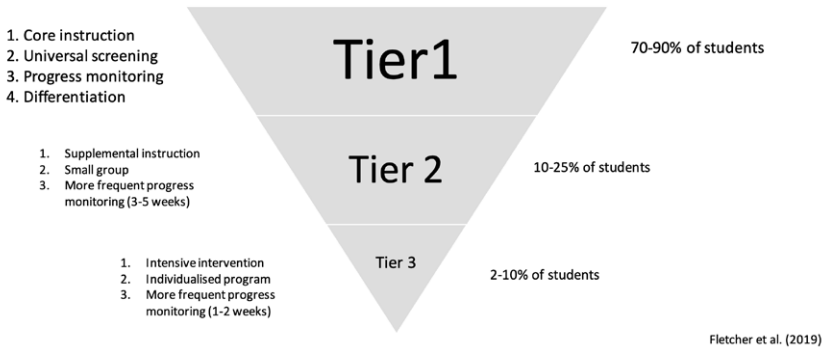

Figure 1. The RtI Framework (adapted from Fletcher et al., 2019)

the need. This is achieved by using more teacher-led systematic and explicit instruction, conducting that instruction more frequently, extending its duration, creating smaller and more homogenous groups, and engaging educators with greater expertise to deliver the interventions. Smaller groups allow for more opportunity for practice, repetition, and feedback (Burns et al, 2012; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Fletcher et al, 2019).

Why should I use the RTI framework in my school?

Students will struggle with their learning for many reasons. The RTI framework provides us with a structured way of ensuring equity with respect to student support and outcomes. If schools are concerned with (i) being research-informed, (ii) identifying struggling students early rather than waiting for them to fail, (iii) developing high quality assessment, curriculum, and instructional practices, and (iv) developing data literacy and responsive teaching, the RTI framework can afford us those opportunities. Additionally, there is good evidence to support the use of its components of universal screening, progress monitoring, systematic and explicit instruction in literacy, and high-quality curriculum and/or program implementation.

While there is good evidence for individual components of the RTI framework, it does not mean there is consistently strong evidence for the model itself or model scalability in schools or groups of schools. This is because issues often arise due to inadequate professional learning, administrative support, coordination/management, meeting and planning time, staffing, and staff buy-in. Positively, RTI framework studies to date demonstrate achievement or performance improvement over time when all components are managed well, but more research is needed to understand implementation fidelity and implementation at scale.

Assessment choice and administration

Careful selection of assessments is essential. We must select assessments that (i) yield meaningful data, (ii) reflect the knowledge and/or skills that we are going to be teaching, (iii) are tied to expectations for learning and (iv) are technically adequate (valid and reliable measures). We also need to ensure that (i) teachers are trained to administer correctly and consistently, (ii) we provide scripted or at least consistent instructions, (iii) observation and/or coaching of teachers occurs during initial administration and scoring, and that (iv) we cross check a percentage of assessments for scoring reliability (Burns et al, 2012). Examples of evidenced informed whole school literacy assessment schedules are available (e.g., see McLean, 2021).

Data evaluation

Time should be dedicated to evaluating assessment data as a whole staff, in year level (grade) teams, and/or in leadership teams. Year level data should be examined to identify any grade wide problems, and class level data should be examined to identify any class wide problems (Burns et al, 2012).

Grade wide problem: More than half the classes within the grade have class wide problems

Class wide problem: Between one third and one half of the students within the class are struggling in a particular area

The flow chart below (adapted from Burns et al, 2012, p.27) can help guide our evaluation process and decision making:

If *class wide* learning problems are detected (between one third and one half of the students within the class are struggling in a particular area), then the grade level teaching teams should examine their grade wide data to determine whether a *grade wide* problem is present (Burns et al, 2012).

If *grade wide* problems are identified (assuming the universal screening tasks were appropriate and administered correctly) here are some helpful questions to ask and answer (Burns et al., 2012):

1. Is a research-based or evidence-informed Tier 1 (core) curriculum in place?
2. Is that curriculum being followed with sufficient instructional time and/or with effective instructional techniques?
3. Is there a scope and sequence document detailing when skills will be targeted and/or mastered across each year? Is it being followed?
4. Have the students mastered prerequisite skills?
5. Does the instructional environment ensure (i) students are actively engaged in their learning, (ii) instructional time is maximised, and (iii) students are set up to respond accurately? If not, are students receiving additional worked examples, guided practice and/or frequent feedback?
6. Is the grade wide problem within one grade level or is there a pattern across grades?
7. Are there commonalities between classes with class wide problems?

If class wide problems are identified (assuming the universal screening tasks were appropriate and administered correctly) here are some helpful questions to ask and answer:

1. Is the teacher enacting the intended curriculum?
2. Is the teacher following the scope and sequence?
3. Is the teacher maximising instructional time and/or allocating sufficient time?
4. Have students mastered pre-requisite skills?
5. Are there commonalities between low performing students in this class?

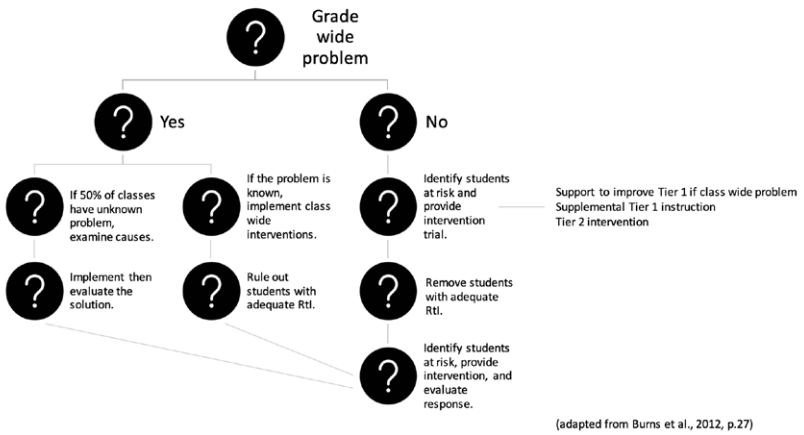

Figure 2. Data evaluation: Finding data patterns (adapted from Burns et al, 2012, p.27)

6 Does the instructional environment ensure (i) students are actively engaged in their learning, (ii) instructional time is maximised, and (iii) students are set up to respond accurately? If not, are students receiving additional worked examples, guided practice and/or frequent feedback?

Whole class and whole grade (core) responses can be planned based on the answers to the *grade wide* and *class wide* questions posed above. Frequently, the solutions are to (i) implement a research based or evidence informed curriculum, (ii) develop detailed scope and sequence documents, (iii) support educators to develop high impact instructional practices, (iv) invest in teacher knowledge by providing high quality professional learning, and/or to (v) establish clear implementation goals, strategies, and stages. When all whole class (core) responses are embedded as described above, we can then identify students who genuinely need additional support and provide them with further instruction at Tier 2 or 3. These students will also require more frequent progress monitoring than is provided by universal screening or benchmarking (Burns et al, 2012; Fletcher et al, 2019).

Problem solving versus standard protocol at Tier 2

If you read books or journal articles on the RTI framework, you may come across the terms *problem solving* and *standard protocol*. These two terms relate to how we go about choosing interventions for students at Tier 2. Many schools tend to favour a problem solving approach, while researchers tend to favour a standard protocol approach, because it is easier to ensure implementation fidelity. The two formats at Tier 2 as described by Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) are summarised in Table 1 below.

Key take-aways

Getting Tier 1 instruction right is of central importance. In doing so we effectively eliminate inadequate instruction as an explanation for poor progress (Hughes & Dexter, 2011) and significantly reduce the number of students at risk (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). At the same time, it is crucial that we (i) develop an evidence-informed assessment schedule, to ensure accountability and reciprocity between teaching and learning, and (ii) ensure our curriculum is high quality and well sequenced. Monitoring students closely at Tier 1 ensures we identify students who need additional instruction in a timely manner. Equally, if too many students are struggling at Tier 1, it may indicate to us that there is room for improvement in our whole class (core) instruction. It is critical to invest in building teacher knowledge and expertise, to build data literacy and assessment administration fidelity, and to foster a culture of responsive teaching and practice improvement. It is critical that the RTI framework is adequately resourced in terms of time and personnel, to ensure all students are supported to reach their potential.

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Problem solving	Standard protocol
• Problem solving = collective brainstorming within a team • The team makes instructional decisions based on individual student needs • Students who struggle are provided a variety of interventions based on need/data • Interventions are tailored to individual/specific needs	• Standard = the same for all students • Protocol = preselected delivery/ format/program • The interventionist/program leader makes instructional decisions that follow the *standard protocol* • A single consistent intervention is used (pre-selected, evidence-informed) • A variety of staff can deliver the intervention, as long as they are well trained and supported to do so.

Table 1. Tier 2 intervention: Problem solving approach versus Standard protocol

Tiered levels of support: Can what happens in the triangles stay in the triangles?

This article, written jointly by **Cathryn Bjarnesen** and **Roslyn Neilson**, points to possible problems in the implementation of a model of tiered support for literacy instruction if critical underlying assumptions are not met.

Response to Intervention (RTI) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) are increasingly widely used instructional systems (Burns et al., 2016) that are designed to support students by ensuring that schools focus on how best to provide instruction. When students do not perform well, RTI and MTSS models dictate that adjustments are made to the way teaching is delivered. This is an important change from practices such as tending to attribute poor achievement results to external factors like the socio-economic status of the students' parents, or waiting for medical diagnoses that locate the problems within the students. To keep the focus on instruction does require an openness and willingness among teaching staff to respond to assessment data and to reflect on their own teaching practices, and this can be challenging – but it is a challenge that has the potential to empower teachers and schools.

We would like to argue, however, that at least in the area of literacy, merely having a tiered support system in place may not be enough to alert schools to situations where instructional practices could, in the interests of effective teaching, be improved.

Many discussions of the implementation of RTI or MTSS refer to a graphic image of triangles that involve three tiers of progressively more focused and intensive support (e.g., Burns et al., 2016). The intensity of support at the three tiers is dependent on student needs, as documented by ongoing assessments. The models typically bring with them an assumption about the expected distribution of student needs. It is conventional to specify that, ideally, approximately 80% of students will progress well in Tier 1, 15% will improve with Tier 2 intervention, with more intense small-group teaching, and no more than 5% will need Tier 3 support, with relatively individualised instruction.

This expectation of the 'natural' distribution (approximately 80%-15%-5%) is what provides an in-built check on the tiered support system. If greater than expected proportions of students needing support are found when assessment is implemented at each tier, this will ideally trigger an identification of weaknesses in the instructional practices.

There are, however at least two vulnerable assumptions involved in the implementation of tiered support models. These assumptions are in practice often inter-twined, and may together present a potential threat to the ability

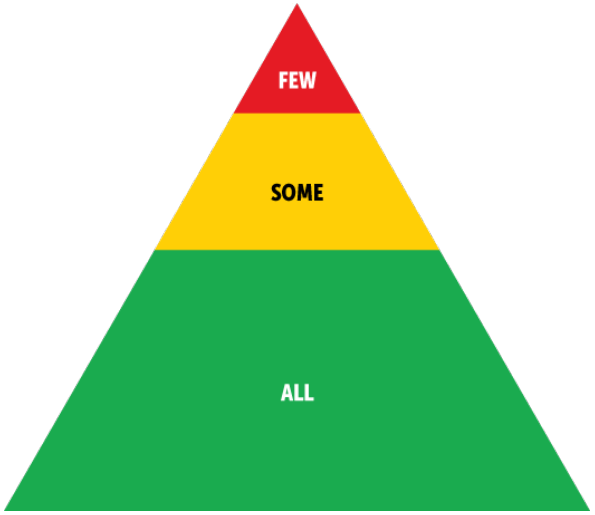

Figure 1: A triangle graphic illustrating the concept of multi-tiered systems of support. Retrieved from https://www.pbis.org/pbis/tiered-framework

of the models to identify situations when teaching practices need to be changed.

Vulnerable assumption 1: There is agreement on best teaching practice

RTI models assume that the instruction being provided at all tiers of the system follows agreed best practice within the research community. Unfortunately, however, there is very seldom clear consensus within the research community on what best practice is; peace has not yet been declared in the Reading Wars. Even if a 'majority' agreement has been reached in the research literature, there remains not only a notorious research-to-practice gap, but also an ingrained suspicion and distrust towards researchers held within the teaching community (Seidenberg, Borkhagen, & Kearns, 2020).

It is, therefore, still quite possible for schools to adopt practices across the tiers of their support systems that are ineffective ways to teach children to read and write.

Vulnerable assumption 2: There is agreement on best practice for assessment

The second assumption, relating to assessment, is particularly critical to the robustness of the tiered support models. Best practice dictates that assessment tools must have high reliability – that is, consistency that allows for re-test. Assessment tools must also have strong validity, so that educators can be confident that they are assessing what they intend to assess – namely, students' progress in the course of literacy acquisition. Even if these best-practice conditions are met, there are many steps involved with the assessments that are included within systems employing an RTI or MTSS approach. Decisions must be made on what will be assessed, when the assessments are carried out, and who will administer and interpret the results. The cut-offs that are used to identify adequate progress are particularly vulnerable within a tiered support system. Not only are there inevitable problems about what to do with students at the margins of the cut-off, but there is also the obvious concern that the proportion of students passing and failing can be adjusted by simply adjusting the cut-off scores.

It is, therefore, still quite possible for schools to use assessment processes in their tiered support systems that are not reliable or valid measures of literacy progress, and quite possible for them to adjust their cut-offs in order to meet the expected distribution of students needing various levels of support.

Some problems: Case studies

In practice, instructional practices and assessment practices adopted by schools are quite likely to be interdependent, and this can create a serious problem. Put simply, within the system there is always the danger of what is referred to disparagingly as 'teaching to the test'. If teaching practice is inefficient but the assessment process is merely designed to reflect what has been taught, it can appear as if everything is going well. In this scenario, whatever happens in the tiered triangles can simply stay in the triangles. It may look as though the MTSS or RTI process is working well within a school, but there may be no positive impact on the outcome of the students' success.

This is not just a hypothetical problem. For many years there was clearly at least a two-tiered system of support in place in schools in many parts of the English-speaking world, when Reading Recovery was the dominant response to poor initial progress in reading. Whole Language, or a version of Whole Language referred to as 'Balanced Literacy', was offered in Tier 1, and the Clay (1995) Observation Survey assessment was administered after one year of schooling had been completed. Those students who did poorly on the Clay Observation Survey were (at least theoretically) provided with Tier 2 Reading Recovery Classes during their second year of schooling.

Incidentally, in the case of Reading Recovery there was no Tier 3 available for students who did not make progress in Tier 2. These students were just 'referred on' elsewhere. This meant that, in many countries, Tier 3 was in practice served by a host of external tutors, special education consultants and speech-language pathologists, and often those students who had not 'recovered' in Reading Recovery gravitated to less-than-effective commercial programs promoting cures for dyslexia (Bowen & Snow, 2017).

In this case, therefore, a tiered support system persisted unchecked because of the inter-dependence of the assumptions about best practice in teaching and in assessment. Whole Language teachers did not teach decoding explicitly, and the assessments used did not evaluate decoding skills systematically. Students who could not decode were not identified as having difficulties provided that they could guess semantically appropriate words when reading the early Levelled Readers. (They were left to fail later in Middle Primary years, when they might be identified as being 'dyslexic'.) Those students who could neither decode nor guess words successfully from context were accepted into Reading Recovery, but they were still not taught to decode.

The problem in the implementation of the tiered support model in this example of the early implementation of Reading Recovery is the well-established fact that learning to decode is an essential skill in the early stages of learning to read (e.g., Hoover & Tunmer, 2020). It took external research, such as that published by Tunmer et al. (2013), *conducted from outside the triangles of support*, to highlight concerns about the support system.

The New Zealand Ministry of Education has presented an interesting development in response to published concerns about Reading Recovery. The Ministry of Education has very recently announced its new tiered support system, see (see Ministry of Education, 2020).

The website announces that the Ministry of Education is providing "*Enhanced support for early literacy*", and in doing so it clearly places itself within a three-tiered levels of support framework. The new system is explained as follows:

> *"Following the evaluation of Reading Recovery in 2020, we are enhancing Reading Recovery. Now known as Reading Recovery and Early Literacy Support, the programme provides a three-tier approach to supporting early literacy in schools that will enable a broader range of children to access literacy support.*
>
> - *Tier 1 – Reading Recovery and Early Literacy Support teachers will be available to support class teachers with providing effective early literacy approaches to all learners, as well as contributing to the school-wide literacy strategy.*
> - *Tier 2 – targeted group support for learners alongside peers supporting children who are not progressing in their literacy learning after their first term at school.*
> - *Tier 3 – 1:1 Reading Recovery will support children still not*

progressing after a year at school until they are able to continue learning alongside their peers."

Alongside, or possibly juxtaposed to this enhancement of Reading Recovery, the Ministry of Education is funding a $10 million initiative from the University of Canterbury – the *Better Start Literacy Approach* (BSLA). The intention of the BSLA is to offer opportunities for professional development in teaching early literacy skills in a "*more systematic and science-based way*" (University of Canterbury, 2021).

A key feature of the BSLA is the publication of a series of (at least partially) decodable readers, intended to "*enhance*" the *Ready to Read Colour Wheel* series of levelled texts. For further information about the *Ready-to-Read Phonics Plus* series, see *https://instructionalseries.tki.org.nz/Instructional-Series/Ready-to-Read-Phonics-Plus*.

Further information about the scope and sequence contained within the *Ready-to-Read Phonics Plus* series is available here *https://gazette.education.govt.nz/articles/behind-the-enhanced-ready-to-read-series/*.

The *Ready to Read Phonics Plus* books are freely available to all mainstream classroom teachers, but there is no clear expectation that they will be used in Tier 1 at all. Tier 1, according to the NZ Ministry of Education website, simply involves "*literacy strategies informed by Reading Recovery teachers*". The decodable readers are an optional extra, to be brought into use in Tiers 2 and 3. In the Ministry of Education version of tiered support, Tier 2 and Tier 3 teachers will still use Reading Recovery approaches (that is, three-cueing strategies for word identification, using books from the *Ready to Read Colour Wheel*) alongside the *Ready to Read Phonics Plus* readers, with Tier 2 involving small groups and Tier 3 being delivered one-to-one.

How progress or lack of progress is identified in the Ministry of Education's system, importantly, seems to be up to the school. As stated on the curriculum website, "*Schools now have more flexibility about how they assess, what assessment information they collect and analyse, and how they use it*." (see *https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Archives/Assessment*). This approach to assessment, unfortunately, frustrates progress monitoring and cross school comparison.

In this three-tiered levels of support system being introduced in New Zealand, therefore, what happens in the triangles will almost inevitably stay within the triangles. It will take further empirical evaluation of the system, *once again conducted from outside the triangles*, to determine whether the nod to systematic phonics currently offered by the NZ Ministry of Education in the form of optional decodable readers makes any difference to the literacy levels of the more vulnerable groups of students in the population.

A simple external assessment as part of this New Zealand tiered support model could help considerably, perhaps involving the Phonics Screening Check that is in use in the U.K. and is being slowly introduced into some Australian States. It would of course always be important to keep evaluating the system from the outside in order to check that the use of something like a Phonics Screening Check is itself fit for purpose in the RTI model. 'Teaching to the test' may or may not be a good thing.

It is certainly not fair to single out New Zealand as problematic in its use of a tiered system of support – it is important to recognise that there has been no overall evaluation of the use of tiered support models within Australia. And we are not alone. Two decades into the adoption of tiered systems of support in the USA, Berkeley et al. (2020) carried out a systematic review, examining all 50 states' Department of Education websites for information about how the tiered systems of support were being used. The results provide a rather sobering snapshot of current RTI or MTSS implementation. Although there is general adoption of some version of a tiered levels of support model in all the USA states, there is very wide variation in how states communicate about tiered systems, how they are used in schoolwide prevention, how schools use them to meet special education requirements, and how they are being implemented in school-wide systems alongside business as usual. The use of tiered models is clearly evolving rapidly in the USA, but it is evolving in a range of directions, and an overall evaluation of the introduction of tiered systems is still extremely elusive. Berkeley et al. (2020) comment that the variation in how states enact their models reflects the fact that that the states are still seeking to determine their own best approach to practice, and they conclude that all these variations signal ongoing uncertainly about what is appropriate.

This is a sobering conclusion, but it is also one that invites us all to work harder at closing the research-to-practice gap in both teaching and assessment in the area of early literacy.

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Sage Advice: MiniLit ten years on

With due disclosure (see end of this article), **Kevin Wheldall** and **Robyn Wheldall** provide a behind-the-scenes look at an evolutionary process within the MultiLit team, giving an insight into some of the planning that needs to go on at the interface between *all* Tier 1 and Tier 2 early literacy instruction.

Ten years is a long time in both educational history and the science of reading instruction. The MultiLit team has been reflecting on the fact that it is now ten years since the first edition of *MiniLit* was published, and at this stage we are ready to document an important step in our journey: the development of *MiniLit Sage*.

MiniLit was originally developed in response to the now largely discredited whole language remedial program known as *Reading Recovery*, and was intended to serve the needs of young, struggling (mainly) Year 1 readers. It was designed as a small group program providing evidence-based Tier 2 instruction in a Response to Intervention (RTI) framework. *MiniLit* has now been adopted by nearly 3,000 schools throughout Australia and overseas. It has become a remedial reading intervention of choice, as documented by Dr Kate de Bruin's 2019 review for Melbourne Catholic Education of Tier 2 literacy intervention programs in use in Australian schools, in which *MiniLit* was named as the top program in terms of supporting evidence for its efficacy. *MiniLit* has consistently been shown to deliver excellent results. A review of the extant efficacy data is to be provided in Reynolds et al. (2021).

MiniLit has clearly withstood the test of time, but even the best programs can be improved. And importantly, during this period the MultiLit team has produced *InitiaLit*, designed as a Tier 1, whole-class literacy program to provide all children with the essential core knowledge and strong foundations to become successful readers and writers. *InitiaLit* is a three-year program, covering the first three years of school (Foundation to Year 2) (MultiLit, 2017, 2018, 2019).

Consequently, the MultiLit team would like to announce that *MiniLit* has now evolved into *MiniLit Sage*. Changes were needed because it is important to

have a program that ensures students who are being taught in a Tier 2 context can move more seamlessly between instructional settings where *InitiaLit* is the Tier 1 classroom program in which they participate. Further, while it was important to keep continuity in what was being taught, we recognised the fact that it was not enough merely to provide Tier 2 students with 'more of the same'

MiniLit	MiniLit Sage	Rationale for changes in MiniLit Sage
Timetabling: 60 minutes, 4-5 times per week.	Timetabling: 45 minutes, 4-5 times per week. 100 lessons.	Easier fit with classroom timetabling.
1. Sounds and words activities 30-40 minutes daily *Learning grapheme-phoneme correspondences and how to blend them to decode words.*	*1. Working with sounds and words* 30 minutes daily *Learning grapheme-phoneme correspondences and how to apply them to spelling.*	• The scope and sequence have been changed to align with *InitialLit* and the *InitialLit* readers • Additional phonemic awareness and handwriting / letter formation activities • An updated approach to 'tricky words'
2. Text reading 7-10 minutes daily *Developing automaticity in word reading*	**2. Practice and application** 15 minutes daily *Reading sounds and words* *Fluency practice* *'Putting it all together' (reading sentences, paragraphs and stories)* *Connected text reading (accuracy and fluency with decodable readers*	• More time and focus on automaticity at the sounds and word level (e.g., sound sprints, word relay) and oral reading fluency (e.g., echo reading) • More time to practice reading using decodable texts and books
3. Storybook reading 7-10 minutes daily		

Table 1. Components of MiniLit and MiniLit Sage lessons

– we had to preserve what was essential to the success of *MiniLit*.

MiniLit Sage is the product of three years of program development and research by our product/program development teams principally in Perth, but also in Sydney, as well as our MultiLit Research Unit (MRU).

At the structural level, we have responded to comments that *MiniLit's* hour-long sessions were difficult to fit into classroom timetabling. We have redesigned the sessions to be 45 minutes in length and we anticipate that students will need to be on *MiniLit Sage* for two to three terms. The major changes are summarised in Table 1, based on Reynolds et al. (2021).

We have also made a simple change to the sequence of phonic skills, so that *MiniLit Sage* and InitialLit are aligned in terms of the order of what is being covered in whole class and small group reading instructions. *MiniLit Sage* uses the same instructional scope and sequence for teaching letter-sound relationships and 'tricky' words as *InitiaLit*, allowing a more seamless implementation of the RTI approach. Another benefit is that the specially developed *InitiaLit* decodable readers, which are aligned with the *InitiaLit* scope and sequence, can be used for the reading of connected text in *MiniLit* lessons. (Of course, *MiniLit Sage* can still be used in the absence of prior *InitiaLit* instruction.)

Although lessons are shorter overall, there is a greater focus on generalising phonic skills to connected text reading at the word, sentence, and passage level. There is a continued focus on all the Five Big Ideas of reading instruction, but it is fair to say that our emphasis has increased on the development of automaticity - the accurate and rapid decoding of text.

There is less emphasis on language comprehension to facilitate reading comprehension, but this aspect is not ignored. Vocabulary and reading comprehension skills are addressed in the reading components of the program. Moreover, for children experiencing language comprehension difficulties which hinders their reading comprehension, we have developed a separate, sister program to *MiniLit Sage*, specifically designed for those young students. Known as *Language Lift*, this new program will be available in the year following the release of *MiniLit Sage*. We anticipate that most young struggling readers will need *MiniLit Sage* because their problems are primarily with inefficient phonological recoding. Others may have less of a problem with decoding but are restricted by poor language development. These students will need *Language Lift*. And, of course, some students will be doubly disadvantaged and will need to access both programs to become competent readers.

MiniLit Sage represents what we believe to be a significant step further forward in providing for the needs of young struggling readers.

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Disclosure

Kevin and Robyn Wheldall are directors of MultiLit Pty Ltd, in which they have a financial interest. They receive a benefit from the activities of the company and the sale of its programs and products, including the programs that are the subject of this article.

Assessing 'Learning Difficulties': Re-imagining the role of the educational psychologist in schools

In this article, **Professor Linda Siegel** explores the roles that educational psychologists (also called school psychologists and school counsellors in various parts of the world) can play in the management of students who are having difficulties with learning.

Overview

What are the options for an educational psychologist when a student is referred to them for assessment related to learning difficulties (LD)? This article discusses the issue of choosing assessments that are relevant to the assessment of LD.

- What information is essential for the identification of LD?
- What information is needed for planning an appropriate intervention?
- Which traditional educational psychologist assessments are optional or unnecessary?

I will be arguing that it is important to conduct a careful evaluation of the student's achievement levels, using individual standardised academic achievements tests. These tests are most useful when they allow error analysis, since this kind of analysis may be needed to characterise the student's difficulty and to facilitate planning for intervention. I will also be arguing that other kinds of information are not essential components of the assessment of a student with LD: namely, information about intelligence test scores, the presence of academic history of difficulties, and risk factors.

This argument allows for a reconceptualisation of what educational psychologists can offer in the field of LD.

Achievement tests: Necessary parts of an LD evaluation

Dyslexia (or severe reading difficulty) is defined as difficulty with word reading accuracy and/or speed of word recognition and/or decoding. A mathematics disability is defined as severe difficulty with the accuracy and/or speed of arithmetic calculation.

A student referred for an LD evaluation will require standardised achievements tests that assess literacy (including word recognition, decoding, spelling, reading comprehension and writing) and numeracy.

Tests of word recognition must include pseudoword reading as well as measures of accuracy and fluency (speed). Spelling tests for both words and pseudowords are also required. Spelling tests are particularly useful if they involve analyses of error patterns (see Lennox & Siegel, 1995, 1996). For example, errors such as *nature* spelled as NACHURE would indicate reasonable phonemic awareness skills (i.e., ability to hear phonemes in words) but problems with orthographic awareness (i.e., representation of the actual spelling in memory) – the spelling is phonemically correct, but CH is an incorrect spelling choice for the /tʃ/ sound in the word. The word *lunch* spelled as LUCH may indicate a problem with hearing and/or identifying the sounds in words, with the /n/ phoneme not being represented. Of course, one would not recommend teaching based on one error – but it is important to look for patterns in order to plan for teaching.

Error analysis does not allow us to distinguish between LD students and typically achieving students; it may be that the level of achievement, rather than LD status, is the best predictor of error types. Analysis of errors is still, however, very useful for planning what to teach (also see Daffern & Fleet, 2021).

Standardised tests of comprehension are more complex to interpret than tests of word recognition, because comprehension is intrinsically difficult to measure. First, are we aiming to assess reading comprehension or listening comprehension? Both have distinctive challenges.

Listening comprehension is often measured by reading a passage or a sentence aloud to the student and asking questions about the passage. If the student answers correctly, we can probably conclude that the student understood the passage. But what do we conclude from incorrect answers? Listening comprehension is inevitably, at least in part, a memory task, because the material is not there in front of

the student to look back and consult. Incorrect answers may signal not a lack of comprehension but rather a memory issue. In reality, listening comprehension and memory are linked.

The measurement of reading comprehension also has several challenges. One of these is the time available to the student to read the passage. We have found that if people with dyslexia are given more time to complete a reading comprehension test, their scores are substantially increased (Lesaux, Pearson & Siegel, 1996). Background knowledge also plays a very important role in understanding what has been read (for a review, see Smith, Snow, Serry & Hammond, 2021). Some reading comprehension tests are flawed to the extent that many of the questions can be answered without reading the passage.

The assessment of achievement level in writing is no less difficult. The writing process cannot be easily captured in a brief assessment. Do we require handwriting, or do we allow the use of a computer? If we ask for samples of written work from the classroom, these come with no information about the conditions under which the writing was done, and with no chance of standardisation.

Some standardised tests do have useful components to give you an idea of students' writing ability overall, but also have limitations in terms of diagnostics. The writing fluency and writing samples subtests of the Woodcock Johnson (Schrank, McGrew & Mather, 2014) are useful as a general assessment of writing competence, but there is subjectivity in the scoring. *The Test of Written Language-4* (TOWL-4, Hamill & Larsen, 2009) is also very difficult to score objectively.

When you look at the scores on these tests, even if they score writing conventions like spelling and writing content separately, it is impossible to know if the difficulties with content are due to handwriting/spelling stopping students from getting their ideas on paper or because they genuinely do not have good ideas to write. For this reason, most standardised tests of writing are not helpful for clues on what to teach.

The only way to know if the student has the ability to compose a good story is to ask them to dictate their story aloud. I find it can be useful to have students tell a story orally based on the pictures on the TOWL-4; this does not allow for objective scoring, but can provide information about the student's creativity that is not evident in a poorly handwritten story.

Vocabulary is related to literacy achievement, and there are many expressive and receptive vocabulary tests available, e.g., The British Picture Vocabulary Scale. There is a problem, though, in terms of knowing if the vocabulary scores indicate a cause of reading/writing difficulty or are a result of it. Many years of struggle with reading may have reduced students' ability to learn vocabulary.

There are many other factors relevant to literacy achievement, such as orthographic awareness (including knowledge of derivation and inflectional morphology – important for learning to read and spell because many English words come from French, Latin or Greek words) and syntactic skills, for which we do not have much choice in terms of standardised tests. They are nevertheless still useful in terms of error analysis and intervention planning.

Assessment of achievement in mathematics must involve tests of calculation (accuracy and fluency). As with literacy, however, analysis of errors is also important. For example, errors could indicate a problem with the understanding of a concept such as place value, or a difficulty with basic calculations. Tests of mathematical reasoning are very useful, but existing tests are not independent of computation skills. An example of a mathematical reasoning subtest that is unfortunately no longer available is the 'Missing Information' subtest, which used to be included in the *Key Math* test (Connolly, 2008). In this subtest, the student was presented with a statement such as 'There are 36 chairs in a room. How many rows are there?' and was asked to say what additional information they would need to solve the problem. Of course, word problems like this in maths might cause difficulties for students with reading difficulties and this may negatively affect their maths scores.

Finally, it is very important, as part of an interview with a student referred for an LD assessment, to find out about the student's strengths in areas such as art, music, athletics, dance, drama, construction, and/or visual spatial skills. Obviously, these cannot be measured by any standardized test, and they are certainly not relevant to the diagnosis of LD, but they are important not only for developing self-esteem but also for planning intervention (e.g., if they have interests in sport, they may enjoy reading stories about famous and successful athletes).

Tests that are not necessary for the identification of LD

There is a long history of expectation that a psycho-educational evaluation for the identification of LD will include an intelligence (IQ) test. There is no evidence, however, to indicate that an IQ or any 'reasoning' or 'thinking' test is necessary for the identification of LD. For a discussion of the logical and empirical issues involved in IQ tests see Siegel (1989), Stanovich (1991) and Siegel & Hurford (2019).

Many studies have found no evidence to indicate that people of different IQ levels who have reading difficulties, differ in the cognitive processes involved in reading or in their patterns of errors (Siegel, 1988). The 'discrepancy definition' of LD (i.e., that IQ must be significantly greater than Reading Score), especially to identify 'dyslexia', has been discredited. Research shows no significant differences in the processes involved with reading between those who have a discrepancy between their IQ scores and their achievement scores, and those who do not (e.g., Fletcher, Francis, Rourke, Shaywitz, & Shaywitz, 1992; Siegel, 1992).

Nor are there any differences on measures using brain imaging (Tanaka et. al, 2011). Furthermore, analysis of patterns of subtest performance on an IQ test does not reliably differentiate between LD and typically achieving children and does not indicate any relationship with achievement scores (see, e.g., D'Anguilli & Siegel, 2003).

Most importantly, evidence-based remediation is equally effective (or not effective) at all IQ levels (e. g., Hurford, et. al, 1994; Pogorzelski & Wheldall, 2002; Stage Abbott, & Jenkins, 2003; Weber, Marx, & Schneider, 2002).

It is quite common for assessments to include measures of basic psychological and cognitive processes. This approach is known as PSW (Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses). For determination of a disability, the PSW model requires the presence of irregular patterns among the various cognitive abilities and achievement scores, and that the individual's intellectual functioning falls in the average range. Cognitive profile analysis, however, has limited diagnostic accuracy in identifying individuals with learning disabilities (e.g., McGill & Busse, 2016, Miciak, et al., 2015).

One of the assumptions of the PSW model is that the performance of

individuals with learning difficulties will differ from that of typically achieving individuals. Yet, there is great individual variation using patterns of strengths and weaknesses analyses, and the research is conflicting on whether there is a difference between PSW performance of students with and without learning disabilities.

Therefore, the diagnostic utility and validity of such measures is questionable. In a simulation study examining various models of patterns of strengths and weaknesses, Stuebing, Fletcher, Branum-Martin and Francis (2012) found that none of them was very useful in identifying students with learning disabilities. Most importantly, a particular cognitive profile of strengths and weaknesses does not predict who will benefit from remediation or indicate what particular intervention strategy to employ. This is particularly the case for individuals with reading difficulties.

Overall, it is not clear what the point is of conducting an assessment that yields an arbitrary number on an IQ test and assuming the intervention will be different at different IQ levels when the evidence is that IQ level does not predict who will benefit from remediation especially given that intervention is the same at different IQ levels.

Another very important reason for objecting to the IQ test or a test of 'reasoning' or 'thinking' as an essential component of LD evaluations is a social justice issue. Currently, in many places, without an IQ test, it is impossible for people with LD to have access to services, including intervention and accommodations. One reason for this is financial. People who can pay for a private assessment can get it quickly; those who cannot have to wait 18 months to two years to get a psycho-educational assessment in the school system, including an IQ test. Post-secondary students and adults not in the school system do not usually have access to free assessment. By requiring all people who want an LD designation to have an IQ test or a test of reasoning and thinking, we are keeping people who are less financially well off from getting the services that they need.

There are two other factors often assumed relevant in a psycho-educational assessment of a student with LD: history of academic impairment, and the presence of risk factors. Arguably, however, although this information may be of interest, it is unclear why such steps are necessary in the assessment, as they are not an essential component of identifying the presence of LD.

Suppose there is no history of academic impairment, as reported by the school. Do we then say there is no LD? Sometimes teachers are not aware there is a problem. In my experience as an assessor, I encountered many children where reports from the school said they had no problem, but they scored very low on standardised tests, at or below the 15th percentile on reading and/or mathematics tests. This is another reason to use standardised tests. Sometimes schools do not know there is a problem.

The same argument is relevant to the determination of whether there is evidence of developmental, health, educational or contextual factors that are risk factors for LD and other learning difficulties. Suppose there are no risk factors, but achievement is low. This is the case with many middle-class families – there appear to be no risk factors but the reality is that some children from these backgrounds still have LD.

Suppose there are risk factors, but achievement is in the average or above average range. Many children come to school with such risk factors but succeed. This is a good reason not to rely on looking for risk factors. Many children from disadvantaged backgrounds do well in the school system. Your home does not necessarily determine whether you will have LD or not.

Overall, therefore, I suggest that assessments for the presence of LD should simply include a thorough assessment of achievement, with comparisons to others of the same age. No other testing is necessary or essential. The intervention should depend on the achievement difficulties of the student.

One of the advantages of emphasising achievement assessment rather than cognitive assessment is that it has practical implications for teaching. We can train teachers and other school personnel to carry out assessments that are linked to effective instruction targeting areas of need. If properly conducted, including relevant analysis of errors, standardized test data can provide important clues to appropriate interventions.

Reimagining the Role of Educational Psychologists

What does this mean for the role of educational psychologists? I suggest we need to reimagine their role. Often, we see educational psychologists merely as test givers and interpreters. I believe that educational psychologists have a vital place in the educational scene. They can and should be making other important contributions apart from carrying out unnecessary tests using irrelevant criteria for identifying LD. We need to streamline our assessment procedures and change the role of educational psychologists to make use of their skills in intervention and mental health. Some of these roles are outlined below.

- Psychologists can and should be knowledgeable about classroom based and individual/small group interventions for students, adolescents and adults with learning disabilities. They can work with schools or post-secondary institutions or adult literacy groups to provide guidance about evidence-based interventions.
- Psychologists can design appropriate interventions, and work with teachers in the school system or adult literacy groups, to develop and monitor such programs. An example of such a program is *Firm Foundations*, developed in North Vancouver, Canada, by a team of psychologists and teachers working together, that teaches early literacy, phonological, and language skills within a Response to Intervention model (Lipka & Siegel, 2010).
- Psychologists can use their expertise in testing to help develop simple, easy to administer screening devices to detect young children at risk for LD, or at least be aware of the devices that exist in the literature.
- Psychologists can help teachers and other qualified school personnel learn to administer and interpret academic achievement tests.
- Psychologists can help with progress monitoring, a critical part of a Response to Intervention model.
- Psychologists can be knowledgeable about controversial therapies and inform the public about research (or the lack of it) relating to these therapies.
- Psychologists can deal with issues of anxiety, depression, gender identity, bullying, etc. and can make valuable contributions in regard to these and other issues. Social and emotional difficulties can accompany LD, and psychologists can help individuals deal with these issues (see Livingston, Siegel, & Ribary, 2019).

There are many ways that the knowledge and experience of educational psychologists can be a valuable asset in helping people with LD. The world of LD will be richer as a result of these expanded roles.

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Emeritus Professor Linda Siegel, University of British Columbia, was the recipient of LDA's Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties Eminent Researcher of the Year Award in 2012.

Linda is the author of 'Not stupid, not lazy: Understanding of dyslexia and other learning disabilities', published in 2016 and distributed by the International Dyslexia Association – see https://shopida.org/collections/books/products/not-stupid-not-lazy

Community voices: Lobbying for better levels of support for students with reading difficulties

This article, co-written by **Olivia Connelly**, **Sarah Gole** and **Jacqui Tarquino**, attests to the efforts of families and community voices to ensure that all students receive appropriate support at school as they learn to read and write. The article finishes with a link to an e-petition to the Victorian State Government, that will be open for signing until May 2022 – LDA encourages you to sign the petition if you agree with the view expressed.

Olivia Connelly:

I'm an LDA Consultant based in Melbourne. I work with students who have language and reading difficulties, with their families and their schools. I have recently had inspiring discussions with two members of the Victorian community who are part of an important grass-roots movement to improve the levels of support offered to children who are not thriving within the school system. Parents' views are often overlooked and un-represented in policy decisions around best practice literacy approaches. But parents are voters, and they can play a powerful advocacy role for education policy changes if their experiences can only be documented and brought to the attention of the decision-makers.

There is a great deal at stake for these families, not only for their own children but also for society at large. As Snow (2020) argues:

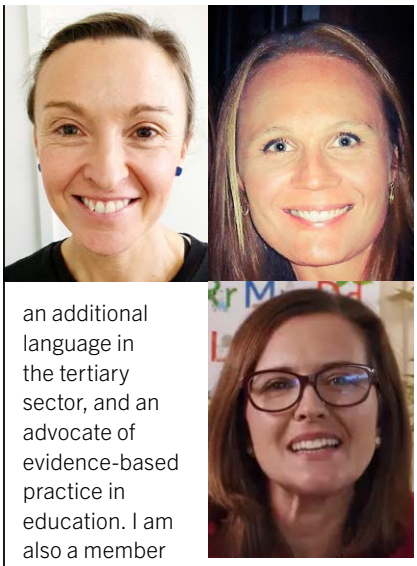
> *The ability of a population to read and write at standards considered competent, and not merely functional, confers widespread opportunities to succeed academically and gain post-school training and education, even in the context of inter-generational academic under-attainment. This in turn affords opportunities for larger numbers to be part of the social and economic mainstream, and sits at the core of reading ability as a pressing public health issue and as a modifiable form of social inequity and disadvantage. (p.2)*

Part 1, below, reports on a survey that has been carried out with parents of children with reading difficulties. Part 2 documents the efforts of a parent/teacher to persuade the State Government to introduce a compulsory Year 1 Phonics Screening Check in Victorian Schools.

Part 1: The DVS Parent Survey – Literacy in Victorian Schools

Sarah Gole:

I'm a parent of a child with reading difficulties, a teacher of English as an additional language in the tertiary sector, and an advocate of evidence-based practice in education. I am also a member of the Dyslexia Victoria Support (DVS) group *https://www.facebook.com/groups/dyslexiavictoriasupport/*. DVS runs a large, very active closed FaceBook group that includes many parents of students with reading challenges. DVS wanted to provide our members with an opportunity to share their experiences about their personal journeys as they and their families navigated through the school system. With considerable support from Heidi Gregory, the founder of DVS, we decided to conduct a survey that would allow at least these respondents to have their voices heard. Our 2020 detailed survey report is available here: https://dyslexiavictoriasupport.com/ .



Our project received much-appreciated advice from members of the SOLAR Lab at La Trobe University, who assisted us with the design of the survey and made suggestions about the analysis of the responses. We thank them for their support.

The survey comprised 21 open-ended and multiple-choice questions. We surveyed 604 parents, and included 436 responses in our analysis. Over 3000 comments were considered using thematic analysis, and this allowed us to draw out common themes. The common themes are summarised under the headings below, along with some representative quotes.

Quality of literacy teaching and intervention

When parents were invited to comment on the programs, approaches, methods and resources their child's school uses to teach literacy, over 50% of parents rated the literacy teaching at their child's school as low or very low quality. The majority of parents reported teaching approaches were whole language / balanced literacy / 3-cueing, which parents noted as not suitable for their child. The most reported intervention programs were Fountas and Pinnell, Levelled Literacy Intervention and Reading Recovery, and these intervention approaches were also regarded as ineffective. Parents whose child did not benefit from school-based intervention, and parents who could not get intervention for their child at school, reported multi-sensory structured language (MSL) as the most common private intervention.

"We had to seek alternate support externally. And did all the research and paid for it all ourselves. It was a hard and difficult process and very time consuming especially when working as well and trying to help!"

Identification of literacy difficulties

62% of parents identified their child's literacy difficulties on their own and paid for private assessment. When parents raised their child's literacy difficulties with schools, they were often dismissed. Parents were advised to 'wait and see' or 'give it time'. There was consensus among schools that some children will always struggle with literacy and not much can be done:

"She is my third child. I highlighted in prep her learning wasn't the 'same' as my other two children. The school said she was fine and would learn at her own pace. By the end of grade one I was frustrated and sad to see my vibrant, happy, easy going girl change so drastically. She was crying every night and so aware that she couldn't do what the other kids in class were doing."

Of parents who were offered assessment by their school, wait times of over 2 years were reported; leading many parents to seek private assessment. Of parents who sought private assessment, many reported it made little difference to the level of support their child received at school. Secondary behavioural difficulties were more likely to attract school support.

Individual Educational Plans (IEPS) and 'Reasonable Adjustments'

One-third of parents said their child did not have an IEP. Parents whose child did have an IEP had to advocate strongly for it. Parents reported IEPs as a 'box-ticking' waste of time. IEPs tended to include intervention that was 'more of the same' that didn't work in the first place and lacked SMART goals and were inconsistently implemented.

27% of parents said their child received no reasonable adjustments at all despite being eligible. Parents whose child did receive reasonable adjustments said their implementation was inconsistent across year levels and teachers.

Teacher knowledge about dyslexia

48% of parents rated their child's teacher as 'not knowledgeable' in dyslexia. Parents took on the responsibility of trying to educate their child's teachers about dyslexia by initiating discussions and sharing web links. Some teachers were receptive to parents' efforts.

"Her teacher this year (grade 5) is the first teacher to actually understand our daughter. She doesn't know much about dyslexia but is always willing to learn and is amazed by how much my daughter teaches her."

Of parents reporting high levels of knowledge about dyslexia, some said the teacher had self-funded professional development.

Literacy difficulties and mental health & wellbeing support

81% of parents said literacy difficulties had a negative or very negative impact on their child's mental health. Over half of parents said their child did not receive wellbeing support at school. Parents noted inconsistency in effectiveness of wellbeing support. Some parents paid for out-of-school wellbeing support.

Changing schools

Over two-thirds of parents had considered changing schools due to their child's literacy difficulties. Parents who did not change schools said there were no better options. Many parents commented that other schools were using the same approach to teaching literacy as their school, so changing schools would be a waste of time. Parents noted their child's social connections at their current school as the reason for not changing schools.

Positive changes in school in relation to supporting child's literacy

Around a third of parents said that there had been no positive changes over time due to teacher reluctance to change instructional practices or teacher knowledge not being sufficient. Parents who said there had been positive changes at their school mentioned compensatory changes such as increased awareness of dyslexia, the implementation of accommodations and modifications such as LOTE exemption and modified class work.

"My son asked his teachers to explain to his classmates what dyslexia was and tell them that this is what he has. This has been a hugely positive impact because 99% of the students are kind, caring, empathetic and helpful to our son and he no longer feels the level of shame he used to."

Benefits and challenges of remote and flexible learning

Parents were divided on the benefits and challenges of remote and flexible learning. Some parents reported benefits such as growth in their child's confidence or fewer distractions.

"Regular 1:1 support whenever he needed it. The ability to be able to ask questions and clarify what was required as many times as he needed. Accommodations whenever needed. Only real challenges were around the social isolation and lack of sport."

Many parents mentioned a benefit of seeing firsthand how much their child is struggling in their learning and some were able to focus on improving their child's literacy skills and/or use of assistive technology.

"It was very upsetting for me to witness how little he can write. He has so many basic gaps with grammar and punctuation, spelling is extremely bad so he won't attempt to write a sentence as he can't spell. He is in his first year of high school, Good to see some of the programs would have a voice to read the questions. I have had to sit with him the entire time to make sure he was on track and knew what he was doing so took me away from my work. The main benefit was that he was not under stress by other kids seeing that he couldn't do the work."

Out of school advice and intervention

Only 10 parents surveyed said their child's school was meeting their literacy needs. All other respondents reported consulting a range of allied health practitioners including paediatricians, MSL therapists and speech pathologists. Many parents commented on the cost of out-of-school support by referring to it as being a prohibitive factor, or a necessary cost given their school was not helping their child.

"She is progressing and gaining confidence. It is very expensive, and I can only send her once a week. I think she would benefit from more time."

Take-homes for the education community

Parents overwhelmingly commented on the need for teacher training in reading instruction in both pre-service teacher training as well as within schools. Parents also called for an updated Australian and Victorian English Curriculum, updated Victorian Department of Education website, assessment and funding for dyslexia.

To sum up what we learned from the survey, the frustrations and concerns expressed by our participants suggest that the situation for students with reading difficulties in Victorian schools is still very problematic. Ultimately, the DVS Parent Survey - Literacy in Victorian Schools Report is an important reminder of the need to put children and families in the centre of decisions around best practice in schools. We hope that the survey will assist those in positions of responsibility to see the impact of ineffective language and literacy practices on children who struggle to read.

Olivia Connelly:

Perhaps the findings of the survey can be best summed up by the following comment, addressed to both the school system and the politicians and bureaucrats who make decisions about the system:

"Work with families not against them. We don't want to make your job harder - we want to give our children better opportunities and a better chance at an equal education to their peers."

This survey demonstrates that many parents are crying out for changes in teaching practices – but, in this time and in this place, their voices are still largely going unheard. There is a huge need for concerted advocacy, so that policy makers, principals and teachers can step up to the collective responsibility of ensuring high quality instruction for all children in their early years.

Part 2: Lobbying for a compulsory Phonics Screening check for Year 1 students in Victoria

Jacqui Tarquino:

I am a teacher, a mother, and a qualified phonics trainer. Recently, I have been working towards persuading Victorian Department of Education to introduce a compulsory Phonics Screening Check (PSC) for Year 1 students. This effort has involved starting up an e-petition to present to the Victorian State Government.

I was brought up within a Whole Language approach, and I know first-hand what it was like to struggle to read and write as a child. As a tutor, I care deeply about the fact that when I go in to school staffrooms and introduce the term 'systematic synthetic phonics' into discussions around improving children's literacy, I often find that I'm the person who teachers avoid. Why do I feel as though I'm speaking a foreign language? The development of reading skills should be the bedrock of early learning in Australia, where we are privileged with a robust education system.

Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) is well supported as an effective teaching method – this has been accepted by three major inquiries into the teaching of reading in the USA, the UK and Australia. The English alphabetic code is very complex, and this means that a critical foundation of literacy involves understanding the intricate relationship between speech sounds (phonemes) and letters (the graphemes that map onto sounds). SSP teaches the English alphabetic code explicitly. As a teaching method, SSP can assist children to navigate the complexities of the English language through better understanding the relationships between letters and sounds. SSP programs are also widely accessible: there are many excellent SSP programs currently available.

Some students can learn to read without SSP, but an absence of a systematic, explicit approach to teaching leaves behind an unacceptably large population of children. Many of these children have learning difficulties. Others have English as an additional language. SSP, therefore, is an inclusive education tool that maximises the chance for the majority of children to learn at the earliest stage possible. We know that the gap only widens over the years between more and less successful students – 'the rich get richer and the poor get poorer'. We also see, in many cases, behavioural and emotional consequences arise from poor reading skills.

Currently, the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) fails to identify children who are struggling with reading and writing in the early years. An earlier universal assessment is needed.

In 2020, the Federal Government invested $10.8 million into a voluntary, free Phonics Screening Check for all Year 1 students in Australian schools. This test can be viewed via the *Literacy Hub*. Modelled from England's Phonics Screening Check, the Australian Phonics Screening Check is a short, simple assessment that enables teachers to measure how well students are learning to decode - to blend letters into words. The Phonics Screening Check is not a diagnostic tool. Rather, it is an early intervention trigger that disrupts the 'wait to fail' approach. It can help to identify children - such as those with learning difficulties like dyslexia, and/or those who require closer assessment and early remediation - to ensure better reading outcomes.

Our neighbours in South Australia first trialled the Phonics Screening Check in 2018. They subsequently were the first Australian state to implement a mandatory PSC for all Year 1 public school students. When the Phonics Screening Check was first trialled there

in 2018 and 2019, only 43 per cent of South Australian students were at the expected achievement level. With ongoing teacher training and support, 63 per cent of Year 1 students in the state's public schools met the expected standard in 2020, and this increased to 67 per cent in 2021. This represents a substantial improvement, and the *Adelaide Advertiser*, 11 November 2021 reported that this was accompanied by a big jump in the State's Year 3 NAPLAN scores for the students who formed the first cohort.

In line with this trend, the New South Wales Department of Education recently announced that, starting in 2021, the Phonics Screening Check has become mandatory for all Year 1 students in NSW public primary schools.

Yet despite the Federal Government's incentive for screening, Victoria has not implemented a mandatory Phonics Screening Check.

Having a Phonics Screening Check in place would help teachers to focus on SSP and understand why SSP is useful. Phonics should not be a topic that teachers in staffrooms avoid. If teachers can be provided with basic data about their children's mastery of the alphabetic code, this would allow them to deliver reading and writing assistance in a timely manner.

All children in Victoria have the right to develop their literacy skills on par with students in neighbouring Australian states. Implementing the PSC would ensure that all Victorian schools begin to teach systematic, synthetic phonics as part of their reading and literacy programs, and that early intervention could be obtained before a child reaches Year 3.

An e-petition requesting that the Victoria Department of Education mandate the Phonics Screening Check for all Year 1 students in Victoria is currently open. If you are a Victorian resident, we urge you to please *sign the e-petition here* and share it on social media and other networks. The e-petition will be open until 18 May, 2022.

Olivia Connelly:

This e-petition was prepared with the support of many participants, including Dyslexia Victoria Support, SPELD Victoria and Learning Difficulties Australia. That support is really appreciated - we need all our children to be given the best chance of learning how to read with the earliest possible support.

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Sarah Gole is a proud mum to three sons. Due to her experience of having her eldest go through primary school without learning to read or spell, Sarah speaks out for systemic change in how language and reading are taught in schools.

Olivia Connelly is the director of Gameplan, a language, literacy and learning practice in Melbourne. She is passionate about supporting children, adolescents and adults with learning challenges, using research-driven practices. She is also the busy mother of two very energetic children.

Jacqui Tarquino is a mother, phonics tutor and trained primary school teacher. Currently she tutors students in phonics and trains teachers through Jolly Phonics in Melbourne. She is a lover of all quality systematic synthetic phonics programs and is ready to start a reading revolution in Victoria.

A commentary on some recent claims made against the Simple View of Reading

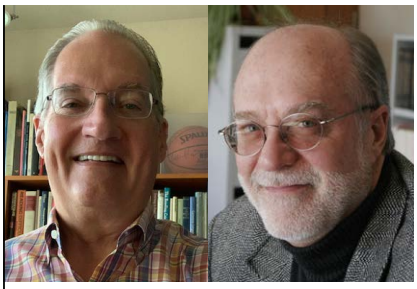
Wesley A. Hoover and **William E. Tunmer**

In early May 2021, *Reading Research Quarterly* (RRQ) published an article by Drs. Nell Duke and Kelly Cartwright (available through open access at *https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.411*) that alarmed both me and Bill Tunmer. We were shocked by how dismissive (and plainly hostile) the authors were toward the Simple View of Reading (SVR) given the limits of the theoretical and empirical substance they provided in support of their position. They argued that the SVR should be replaced by a new model, the Active View of Reading (AVR), which, they claimed, addressed the results from a large volume of research conducted over the 35 years since the SVR was first introduced and tested (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Gough, 1990). In short, their aim was ". . . to offer an alternative to the dominant model presented to practitioners, the SVR, that conveys key advances from scientific research on reading not captured in the SVR" (p. 15).

In reading their paper, we believed that the authors misunderstood the SVR, that the findings from the advances in science they claimed discredited the SVR in fact did not, and that the alternative model they proposed as its replacement lacked strong support, either theoretical or empirical. We believed an immediate response was needed to counter their claims.

We contacted RRQ in mid-May concerned that, given our prior work on the SVR, we had not been invited by the editors to respond to Duke and Cartwright's (2021) strong criticisms of the well-supported SVR. Such typically would have been sought to appear alongside the article in the same issue. We asked if they would consider publishing a critical response, and indeed, they agreed to expedite their review process such that if we submitted an acceptable commentary, it could be published in a timely fashion. We drafted our response within a four week period and submitted it (blinded) to RRQ. We then went through a revise and resubmit process based on comments from two reviewers, addressed a subsequent set of concerns raised by the RRQ editors, and got to the final publication version in late October (Hoover & Tunmer, 2021), available through open access at *https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.446*. Six months from start to finish does represent an expedited process on the part of everyone who was involved!

Our commentary addresses several issues, and we first deal with what the SVR is (and isn't). We argue that the SVR provides a big picture view of reading, representing the *proximal* factors (those that are causally closest in origin to determining reading comprehension) and not the *distal* ones exerting influence through them. As an example, the SVR, holding that reading comprehension is the product of word recognition and language comprehension (i.e., *RC = WR x LC*), does not mention vocabulary as a critical factor. But it is not the case that vocabulary is unimportant



to reading competency, rather its influence on reading comprehension largely operates through language comprehension. The vocabulary one knows is part of what drives one's ability to understand language, and it is the same capacity that is used in driving the understanding of language represented in print. Thus, as has been shown empirically in several studies (e.g., Tunmer & Chapman, 2012), vocabulary serves as a distal factor influencing reading comprehension through language comprehension, rather than as a proximal one impacting it directly. This distinction between proximal and distal is a critical one when thinking about models of reading, and Duke and Cartwright (2021) fail to acknowledge it in arguing that the SVR be replaced because ". . . there are many contributors to reading not named in the simple view . . . that play a substantial role in reading" (p. 1).

Duke and Cartwright (2021) also argue that because word recognition and language comprehension can be shown to interact as processes (e.g., in disambiguating homographic words such as *read*), any cognitive model that depicts them as independent, as the SVR does, is inconsistent with the science of reading. But we distinguish between models of cognitive *capacities* (depicting relations between cognitive achievements)

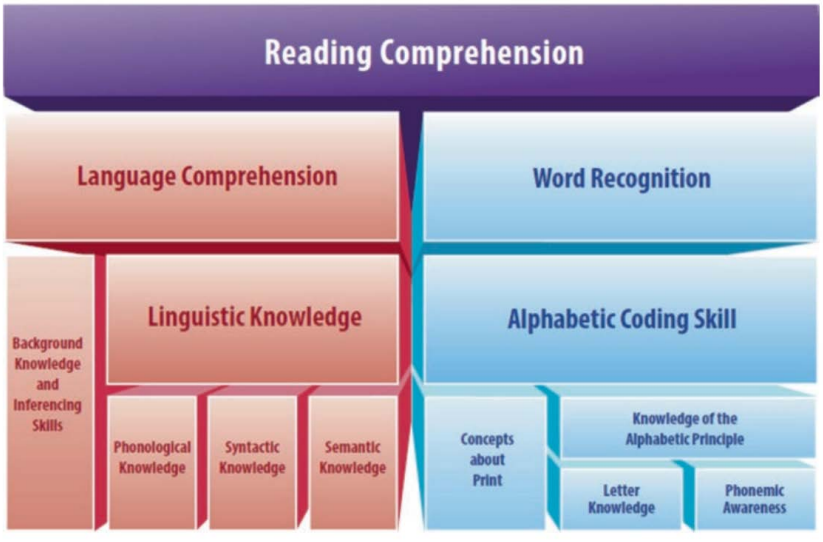
and models of cognitive *processes* (depicting how those achievements are accomplished). The SVR represents the former, and defining word recognition and language comprehension as independent capacities underlying reading comprehension does not entail that the processes allowing them must always operate independently. Rather, the SVR postulates that the capacity to recognize words in isolation quickly and accurately (regardless of how that is achieved) is a causally connected component underlying reading comprehension. And support for this claim has been widely found across many high-quality studies of the SVR (e.g., Language and Reading Research Consortium & Chiu, 2018; Lervåg, Hulme, & Melby-Lervåg, 2018; Lonigan, Burgess, & Schatschneider, 2018).

We also counter the three arguments Duke and Cartwright (2021) make regarding findings they claim invalidate the SVR. First, they argue that research shows reading comprehension can fail from factors other than failures in word recognition or language comprehension. They cite a number of studies they claim are supportive, but we critically review several of them to show why they are not. Second, they argue that in accounting for variations in reading comprehension there are large amounts of shared variance between word recognition and language comprehension (meaning that these two factors vary together with reading comprehension), and that this means there is a shared process underlying them. While there are many studies showing such shared variance (e.g., Foorman & Petscher, 2018; Foorman, Wu, Quinn, & Petscher, 2020; Lonigan, Burgess, & Schatschneider, 2018), this does not necessitate a shared process responsible for that variation. We offer another account, one based on Matthew effects (Stanovich, 1986), and go on to show what kind of evidence would be needed to justify inclusion of a shared process between word recognition and language comprehension as a proximal factor in reading comprehension. Third, we counter, citing high-quality research, the claim that self-regulation is a critical component that operates directly on reading comprehension as opposed to indirectly impacting it through word recognition or language comprehension.

We also review the AVR, finding little evidence to support the additional proximal factors it proposes beyond the two proposed in the SVR. And we argue that what is proposed obscures what reading research has found to be the most critical factors in acquiring competency in reading comprehension—namely, word recognition and language comprehension. Further, we argue that given its lack of supportive evidence, using the AVR in practice runs the risk of both bringing harm to those learning to read, as well as leading reading professionals to turn away from science when they discover that their actions based on the model can hinder student progress in reading.

Finally, we briefly describe our model of the capacities needed to master word recognition and language comprehension, identifying the distal factors that operate through them in supporting the development of reading comprehension. The model is described in our recent book, *The cognitive foundations of reading and its acquisition: A framework with applications connecting teaching and learning* (Hoover & Tunmer, 2020), which was reviewed in the last edition of the LDA *Bulletin* (Moore, 2021). Duke and Cartwright (2021) dismiss this model out of hand because it is based on the SVR. Their argument is that any model holding that word recognition and language comprehension are independent capacities undergirding reading comprehension is inconsistent with the science of reading. We counter this claim in our commentary, going back to the distinctions between proximal and distal factors, and between models of cognitive capacities and processes.

In closing, there is much we now know about reading that extends our understanding beyond what is captured in the SVR (though in our view, the AVR does not properly represent that understanding). But there is also very little in what we now know that would argue that the SVR fails to capture its proximal causes and their interrelationship. We encourage you to read our RRQ commentary, and we would welcome your comments and questions, either through the LDA *Bulletin* or through contacting us directly via email (Wesley Hoover at *hoover.wesley@gmail.com* and William Tunmer at *w.tunmer@massey.ac.nz*).



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LDA is intending to collate a simple live calendar of upcoming events from a range of sources that our community might be interested in. Council members Jacinta Conway and Melanie Henry have offered to coordinate this project. The live calendar will be published on the LDA website, and LDA will also send out monthly e-newsletters to those individuals and institutions who subscribe to our email list, to supplement the regular social media advertising that is available to everyone now.

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Contributions are welcome from researchers, literacy and mathematics specialists, classroom teachers, speech-language pathologists, school psychologists, and other professionals in the field of education. Articles focusing on effective approaches to teaching and effective intervention are particularly welcome.

Contributions to the LDA Bulletin typically include:

	Content	Approx. Length *
Feature articles	Topics likely to be of interest to LDA members that summarise research on a significant aspect of literacy or numeracy learning.	2000 - 3000 words
Reports from the chalk face	Summaries of the implementation of specific evidence-based school practices.	2000 – 3000 words
Debates and discussions	Overviews and evaluations of relevant controversies in the field of education.	2000 words
Reviews of resources	Critical evaluations of assessment tools and available teaching resources	1000 – 2000 words
Book reviews	Critical reviews of published books in the field of education.	1000 words
Journal article reviews	Critical reviews of relevant peer-reviewed research.	1000 words

* All length guidelines are flexible, depending on the content of what is covered.

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Please contact Roslyn Neilson, LDA Bulletin Editor, with any queries, suggestions for topics, or proposed submissions: *bulletin.editor@ldaustralia.org*

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