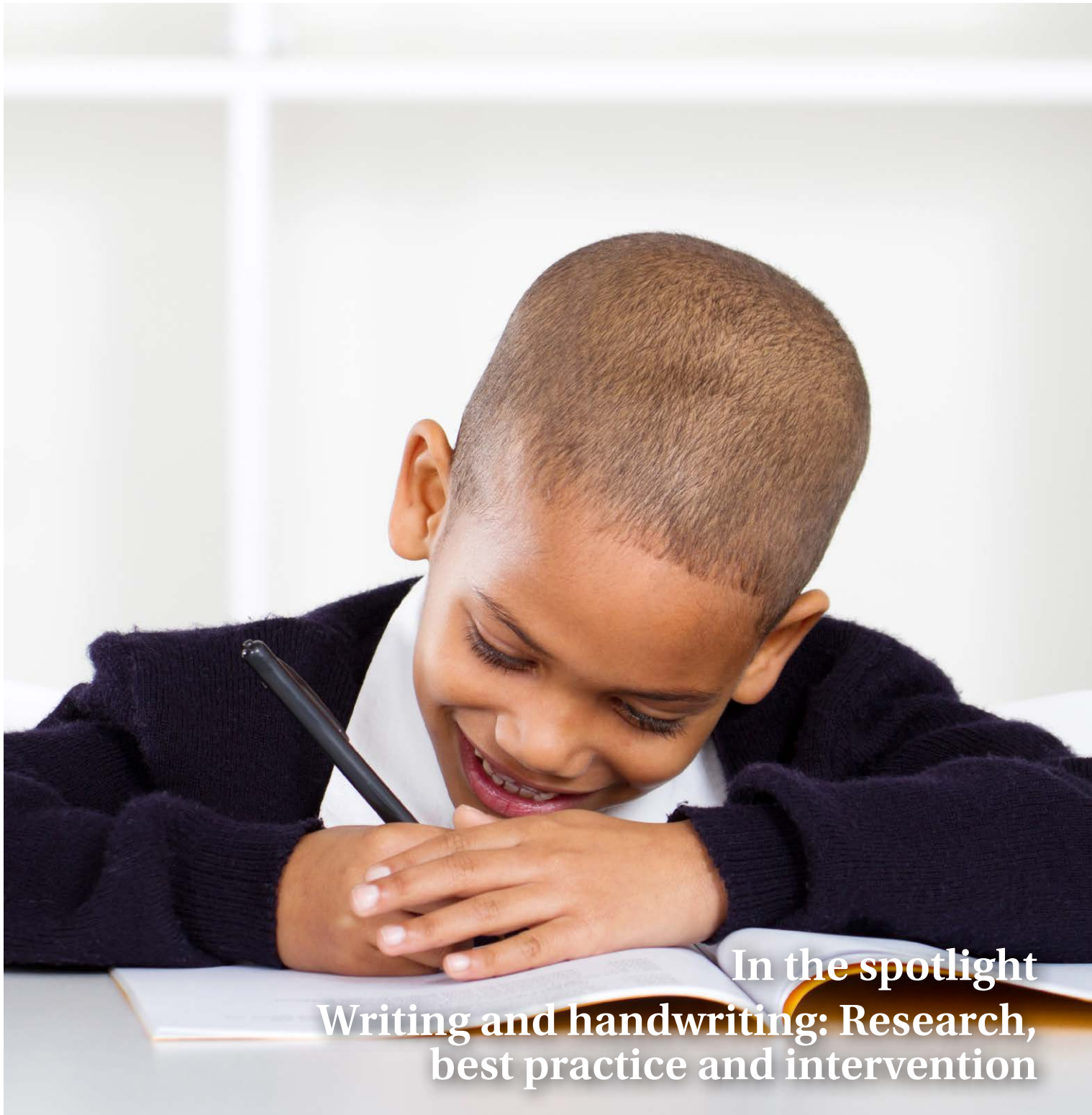


Bulletin



In the spotlight
Writing and handwriting: Research,
best practice and intervention

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LDA Contacts

CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS

PO Box 76, Mount Waverley VIC 3149

EMAIL ENQUIRIES

enquiries@ldaaustralia.org

LDA MISSION

Learning Difficulties Australia is an association of teachers and other professionals dedicated to assisting students with learning difficulties through effective teaching practices based on scientific research, both in the classroom and through individualised instruction.

THE BULLETIN

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3 From the President

Elaine McLeish

5 Council news

Melanie Henry

6 Consultant notes

Elaine McLeish

7 In this issue of the Bulletin...

Julie Scali

8 Writing and writing instruction

Emina McLean

12 Teaching Sentence Construction in Written Narratives: One Frame at a Time

Jenny Baker

18 Current perspectives on disorders in written expression and handwriting

Peta Collins

Learning to Read the Write Way: A policy brief

Karen Ray, Kerry Dally and Alison Lane

Developing orthographic knowledge to help challenged early learners master writing alphabet letters

Kathryn Mathwin

Book Review: Essay writing for adolescents with language and learning difficulties

Jacinta Conway

"A Day with Linnea Ehri and Friends" in Review

21

28

32

34

In this issue of the Bulletin...

Julie Scali, Editor, LDA Bulletin

To wrap-up 2022, I am delighted to share with you our *Writing and Handwriting* issue. The theme of this *Bulletin* focuses on the essential components of high-quality writing instruction with a particular emphasis on handwriting and syntax. It delves into the types of writing difficulties students can experience, and offers recommendations and interventions.

Earlier this year, The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) published 'Writing and writing instruction: An overview of the literature'. This comprehensive literature review outlines theoretical foundations, pedagogies, current challenges and opportunities for high quality writing instruction. Emina McLean, the author of the review, has summarised the key findings and recommendations for evidence-based writing instruction in the classroom for our keynote article.

The focus on writing, in this issue, is of particular importance in Australia at the moment as there has been significant research highlighting a steady decline in Australian students' writing standards for many years. In a recent report, the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO, 2022) outlined the findings of their large-scale, longitudinal 'Literacy and numeracy' project which analysed 10 million NAPLAN writing samples from 2011 to 2021, of students from Years 3-9.

What was particularly interesting about this study were findings related to student progress and achievement in sentence structure. Out of a potential score of 6, only 13% of students achieved a score of 5/6 and only 2% of students scored 6/6 in Year 9. When sentences are

the building blocks of all writing, these statistics are concerning. In this issue, Jenny Baker offers a comprehensive and practical approach to teaching sentence structure through explicit instruction and high quality worked examples.

Following on from Jenny's work, Peta Collins discusses current perspectives on disorders in written expression and handwriting. This should satisfy the numerous requests from LDA members and PD attendees for professional learning on Specific Learning Disorder in written expression, also referred to as Dysgraphia. Peta unpacks the confusion around diagnosis, terminology and presenting features of Dysgraphia and handwriting motor disorders. Peta also makes recommendations on possible interventions and possible accommodations based on specific difficulties presented.

The other key aspect of this issue is highlighting the importance of effective handwriting instruction, a teaching area often overlooked yet critical for the transcription aspect of the writing process. In this *Bulletin* issue, Karen Ray et al. have generously shared a handwriting policy from the University of Newcastle. It outlines the potential gains of handwriting fluency, a handwriting fluency acquisition model, and shares promising research on the Write Start-K intervention program.

Of equal interest in the handwriting space, Kathryn Mathwin and colleagues have summarised their research on a handwriting program that was trialled with a small group of students struggling with handwriting. This study focuses on the link between developing orthographic knowledge of alphabetic letters to improve capacity to write alphabet symbols. This study has promising results and interestingly, both this piece and the work of Ray et al., as previously mentioned, recommends moving away from traditional handwriting intervention approaches—of students copying or tracing letters—to remediate handwriting difficulties.

This issue also includes a book review specifically for secondary teachers, on *Essay Writing for Adolescents with Language and Learning Difficulties*. Written

by Kim Knight and reviewed by Jacinta Conway, the book provides practical guidance and recommendations for teachers in how to analyse texts and essential essay structures.

An excellent read for teachers and learning support specialists in the secondary context.

Finally, in this issue, we celebrate the recent, wonderful professional development events with our special guest, Professor Linnea Ehri. Linnea's work in reading research and advocacy of evidence-based practice in literacy is phenomenal. It was a privilege to hear about her decades of research on orthographic mapping, in person. Take a moment to enjoy a recap of those special days and the wonderful feedback from our attendees.

This issue of the *Bulletin* is my first as Editor. I just want to say thank you to Kim Knight, my wonderful Copy Editor, and Ros Neilson, retiring Editor, for her unwavering support and guidance. Thank you also to all our authors for their fantastic contributions to this issue.

I would also like to wish you all a very happy and joyous holiday season. Happy reading!

Julie Scali
Editor, LDA Bulletin

Reference

Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) Ltd. (2022), *Writing development: What does a decade of NAPLAN data reveal?* edresearch.edu.au

Julie Scali is the Director of Literacy Impact, specializing in structured literacy and Response to Intervention. A former deputy principal in Australia, she now works with principals, school leaders and teachers with consultancy, professional learning and online modules to embed schoolwide evidence-based literacy approaches.

