

In this issue of the Bulletin...

Ros Neilson, Editor, LDA Bulletin

“If you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you’ll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view ... until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.”

Spoken by Atticus Finch in *To Kill A Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee

It is not really a ‘simple trick’, in Atticus Finch’s terms, to consider things from the point of view of students who experience difficulties in learning to read and write. It is, however, a crucially important trick for teachers to practise. From a student’s point of view, literacy skills pervade most day-to-day activities from the beginning of schooling until the point when formal education is completed. This means that for those students who struggle to learn to read and write, day-to-day school life involves not only incessant, difficult task demands, but also the unavoidable awareness that many others seem to find it easier. As teachers, we have to understand how difficult it must be for these students to keep trying.

The theme of this issue of the LDA Bulletin is ‘Learning struggles and resilience’. Our contributors include experienced academics, including several members of very active research teams in Australia, as well as teachers and school administrators who are writing from the chalk face. We thank all our contributors sincerely for their efforts to try to help us to ‘climb inside the skin’

of all children as they learn to read and write. Taking this point of view can not only help us to ‘get along better’ with students and support their resilience – it can hopefully also help us to teach better.

Our keynote author, James Chapman, sets the tone for this issue. He has researched the issue of self-concept for many years, and he presents a meticulously documented case that explains why learning to read is about the ‘mind’ as well as about the ‘words’. He points out that students’ sense of themselves as strong or weak readers develops very early indeed. He also explains how important it is to provide young children with strategies for reading that allow them to feel that they are in control rather than just guessing, and to believe that their techniques for identifying words actually work.

Mark Boyes and his team of researchers have summarised qualitative research evidence they have collected that brings together the stories that children with reading difficulties and their families tell. Their article explores factors that promote resilience, and they provide initial evidence of a support program that aims to strengthen children’s ability to cope. An important theme that emerges from their research is the importance, for students and their families, of having supportive schools and teachers who understand what they are experiencing.

Linda Graham’s team of researchers have provided a summary of a recently published article that forms part of a longitudinal follow-up study on the emergence of behaviour disorders in seven disadvantaged Queensland primary schools. They report a concerning misalignment between Children’s reading progress in Grades 1 to 3 and teachers’ concerns and support provided in the classroom. Children’s behaviour sometimes seems to mask their difficulties with literacy. These researchers recommend the implementation of finer-grained measurements of reading progress to assist teachers’ management plans in the early years.

Tom Nicholson backs up the argument from Linda Graham’s team that there are very strong reasons to ensure that academic support is combined with behavioural support when working with students who present challenging behaviour.

Deanne Francis and Genevieve McArthur from Macquarie University have contributed a summary of a literature survey on reading and emotional health carried out by



their international research team. They follow up their findings with a pointer to the practical resources, based on the research evidence, that are available for the public from the Macquarie Centre for Reading. Nicholas Badcock and honours student Sophia Soares extend the discussion to the level of tertiary education, providing evidence relating to the repercussions of reading anxiety in university students.

Even if challenging behaviour in the classroom does stem from adaptations to the experience of learning difficulties, the disruptions are a problem and the behaviour has to be managed. Micaela Rafferty and Jill Hellems provide a very constructive set of management principles, based on positive teaching strategies. As a companion piece to the Rafferty and Hellems article, Jessica McLaren, a special education teacher, provides a review of the MultiLit team’s newly published book, *Positive teaching for Australian Primary Schools*.

The final review in this issue is not of a book, but of a website - a ‘Balanced Literacy’ resource website, *Foundations for Literacy Learning*, that has recently been launched amidst quite a bit of publicity. Reid Smith, writing as a Head of Curriculum in a phonics-friendly school, tackles head-on one of the claims emanating from the *Foundations for Literacy Learning* website: the claim that systematic phonics reduces students’ motivation to read because it necessarily involves joyless ‘drill, skill and kill’. If you ‘climb inside the skin’ of students who are actually gaining mastery of the alphabetic code, Reid Smith argues, what you’re likely to find is not emotional doom and gloom, but joy.

We hope you enjoy this issue of the LDA Bulletin!

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