

An interview with David Kilpatrick

Ros Neilson interviews David Kilpatrick in Melbourne during his busy 2019 Australian speaking tour for LDA. They talk about Aussie rules, Asian Fusion, and making sense of reading.

David Kilpatrick and his wife Andrea met with a group of LDA members before his scheduled full-day Melbourne workshop, on the Sunday afternoon of what could otherwise have been a quiet weekend off in the middle of his busy Australian speaking tour during August 2019. David had kindly agreed to spend some time telling us about his own professional history for the benefit of readers of the LDA Bulletin. It was delightful to find in this interview context that David shared his ideas with the same energy, conviction and informal charm that he demonstrated when he was presenting the whole-day workshop sessions – the same qualities, in fact, that a few of us had witnessed when he had been trying to make sense of new experiences like Australian Rules football at the MCG and Asian Fusion restaurant fare on the previous day. David's enthusiasm just didn't seem to tire.

David Kilpatrick is a Professor of Psychology at the State University of New York College at Cortland, where he teaches courses to school psychologists covering educational psychology, children with disabilities and learning disabilities. He has also practised for many years as a Certified School Psychologist. As he recounted how he

had developed an interest in literacy, it seemed that it was the practising school psychologist speaking to us rather than the academic. He recounted that he had been introduced fairly early in his career to the research literature that pointed out the importance of phonemic awareness as a component of literacy development. He told a story of how, one year when his school had run out of funding for Reading Recovery teachers, he put into practice some of the ideas he had learned from reading the academic research, and continued this project, together with the teachers in his school, for a five-year study. As he put it, it was a case of school psychologists and teachers recognising that there was a problem, rolling up their sleeves, and simply doing some of their own research. What he noticed in his own school at the end of that study was a striking reduction in the number of students who presented as continuing referrals for reading difficulties – a reduction that paralleled the effects reported by the formal researchers. One of David's professional mentors, Philip McInnis, confirmed his school-based observations. David's wife Andrea contributed her experience of the same phenomenon: she taught mathematics in Upper Primary classes, and she, like so many other teachers, had felt at a loss when so many of her students had difficulty with reading. It was a revelation for her, too, simply to put into practice some of the skills that David was talking about.

David said that he developed his theoretical position on the need for advanced phonemic awareness to facilitate orthographic learning as he studied the research literature, initially reading the literature through the lens of Linnea Ehri's research on orthographic development and David Share's self-teaching hypothesis of learning to read new words. He mentioned that his 2015 book, *Essentials of Assessing, Preventing and Overcoming Reading Difficulties*, published by Wiley, had originally been aimed at school psychologists – he had been trying to make what he had learned about the relevant research

accessible to his colleagues in his own discipline. He confessed that he was surprised when the book reached a much wider audience, including teachers, administrators, speech-language pathologists, and other special educators. The frequent guest speaker requests he has received since the publication of his book have seemed to surprise him. He commented that it seemed all to be happening to him, rather than something that he was pushing for himself.



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David's point about the range of professionals from different disciplines who were interested in his book led to a wider discussion. There is no one discipline that covers the field of reading teaching and reading research, and given the complexity of the area and the huge volume of the available research, specialisation is obviously necessary. David spoke about hoping to increase the opportunities for universities to gain access to experts in teaching reading who could offer courses within a range of disciplines. The LDA members present at the interview, who themselves represented a range of disciplines, fully agreed with the point he was making – there are great challenges and opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration in the area of literacy.

David confirmed that, as is the case with many readers of this LDA

Bulletin, his whole working life has been carried out in a context where constructive philosophies that support Whole Language teaching have been the norm. A very positive development to which he has contributed in the American context is the establishment of *The Reading League*, an organisation originally formed by members of the *Scientific Society for Studies of Reading*. The aim of *The Reading League* is to influence classroom teaching, with the motto 'As we know better, we do better.' The organisation advocates evidence-based reading instruction and systematic teaching by providing on-line information links and recommended resources, conducting monthly FaceBook Live Events, holding an annual conference, and providing a library of YouTube videos of professional education events. LDA Bulletin readers will find the link – <https://www.thereadingleague.org> – very useful.

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Thanks to David and Andrea Kilpatrick for coming to Australia to share their ideas and resources, and thanks to the LDA Executive and volunteers for making it all happen.

Dr Ros Neilson is a Speech-Language Pathologist working in private practice as a consultant and researcher. She specialises in early literacy and reading difficulties, with a focus on the nexus between oral language and literacy.

Award Presentations following the AGM

Presentations to the recipients of each of the LDA Awards, as well as the AJLD Eminent Researcher Award, followed the 2019 AGM on 26 October. Each of the recipients made a brief presentation following the acceptance of their Award.

The recipient of the LDA Mona Tobias Award, **Jennifer Buckingham**, reflected on the difficulties of bringing about the changes required to implement effective reading instruction for all children, based on the scientific evidence of what works. The summary of her presentation is provided on pages 8 and 9 of this Bulletin.

The recipient of the LDA Bruce Wicking Award, **Steven Capp**, outlined the road he had followed in adopting evidence-based practices in his school. He drew particular attention to the need to recognise that intervention should not be seen as separate from good practice, and that catering for learning difficulty is synonymous with what is best practice for all children. He also noted that the process of coming to understand the research into learning difficulties had provided him with a better understanding of how ALL children learn, and that by applying a similar systematic approach to the teaching of mathematics as had been applied to the teaching of reading had led to similar improvements in mathematics achievement at his school. The summary of his presentation is provided on pages 10 to 11 of this Bulletin.

The recipient of the LDA Rosemary Carter Award, **Jan Roberts**, reflected on life as an LDA Consultant. The summary of her presentation is provided on pages 12 to 13 of this Bulletin.

The recipient of the AJLD Eminent Researcher Award, **Professor William Tunmer**, provided an overview of his most recent work on the cognitive foundations of learning to read, which provides a framework designed to help reading professionals better understand what their students are facing as they learn to read in alphabetic writing systems. It is argued that what is needed to help intervention specialists achieve better outcomes is a clearly specified conceptual framework of the cognitive capacities underlying learning to read, which will provide the basis for an assessment framework that is linked to evidence-based instructional strategies for addressing the literacy learning needs of struggling readers. Like the simple view of reading, the Cognitive Foundations Framework aims to build a broad understanding of what is cognitively required for learning to read, laying out the relationships between the cognitive requirements. Further information on this conceptual framework is provided in his article, co-authored with Wesley Hoover, published in the May issue of the *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties* (Volume 4, No 1, pages 75–93).

