

Book Review: Equipped for Reading Success: A Comprehensive, Step-By-Step Program for Developing Phoneme Awareness and Fluent Word Recognition

Reviewed by **Kate Munro**
and **Ann Ryan**.

David A. Kilpatrick, *Equipped for Reading Success: A Comprehensive, Step-By-Step Program for Developing Phoneme Awareness and Fluent Word Recognition*, Casey & Kirsch, 2016.

You can judge a book by its cover: if it has lost its back cover, is tatty at the edges, slipping its spiral binding and showing signs of much wear, you know it is well used and that means it must be good! This is how we find our copies of Kilpatrick's book *Equipped for Reading Success*, relatively new but battered from daily use. From early years readers to middle secondary students, it is now unthinkable to conduct a literacy session without having 'Kilpatrick' on hand. And if we fall out of routine, there is an oft heard cry from students, 'When are we going to do that word thing?' Yes, this comes from students of all ages which, oddly, one may not expect from a comprehensive phonological program for developing phonemic awareness and fluent word recognition. So, what is the secret to its popularity with students

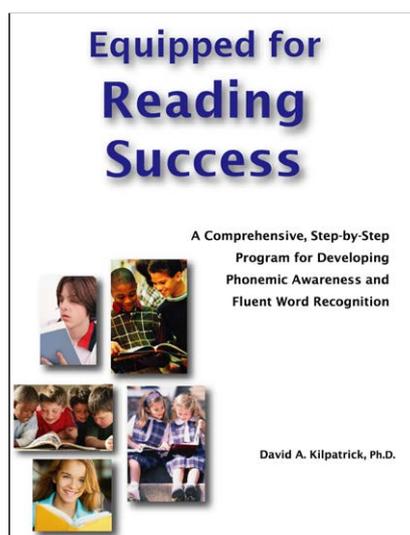
and its appeal to teachers who treat the book with the reverence of a much-loved recipe book?

David Kilpatrick is well known for his book, *Essentials of Assessing, Preventing and Overcoming Reading Difficulties* (2015) which, according to Dr Louisa Moats, 'represents one of the most potent linkages between science and educational practice available to us now.' (2016). While offering essential information on assessment tools and techniques, the text explores ways to incorporate recent research findings on word recognition into practice.

The Simple View of Reading (Tunmer & Gough, 1986) identifies word recognition and language comprehension as the two components necessary for reading comprehension. Kilpatrick's concern that students with poor word-level reading skills almost universally present with poor phonemic awareness skills has provided the impetus for writing *Equipped For Reading Success*.

This text has evolved from an earlier collaboration with Dr Phillip McInnis and his program, Assured Readiness for Learning (ARL), which in turn had followed on from work in the 1970s with Dr Jerome Rosner and the Rosner Auditory-Motor Program. But much has changed since then, especially in the field of reading science.

Kilpatrick sets out with a clear goal '... to close the gap between what scientists know about the reading process and what educators actually do to teach children to read.'



His bibliography includes over 300 research studies and reports, although these are not cited within the body of the text so as to keep the content easily readable. While the text is presented as a 'program' it is far more. Few 'programs' provide the extensive detailed analysis and theory of reading as this text does in the introductory chapters. Concepts are carefully and thoroughly developed on the assumption that readers may not have broad background knowledge in the field of reading. Yet new and challenging ideas are explored in an engaging way, while information is dense and thought-provoking with numerous references to research. Before one gets to the training program the reader's thinking is well primed so that, for practitioners,

fidelity to the program delivery follows with ease.

Part 1 explores 'What Needs to be Done?' The relationships between phonemic awareness, orthographic mapping, and word fluency are discussed. Kilpatrick quotes Dr Linnea Ehri's concept of orthographic mapping, 'a mental process to permanently store words for immediate, effortless retrieval.' He emphasizes the importance of orthographic mapping for word storage and describes the critical role of phonemic proficiency (read proficiency as automaticity in this context) believing that 'We will not see improved word recognition until we adopt a proper understanding of how we store words.' Orthographic mapping is the process of connecting sounds in spoken words to letters in print. Kilpatrick makes a clear distinction between the process of phonics and orthographic mapping by tying the first to decoding and the second to sight word recognition. Some may view this distinction as that often referred to as dysphonetic and dyseidetic dyslexia. However, this distinction gives a framework to the elements of learning to read and allows the teacher to know what to teach, and how to teach it.

Part 2 sets out 'How To Do It'. Kilpatrick outlines three components of orthographic mapping (automatic letter-sound associations, highly proficient phoneme awareness and word study), while the training program within *Equipped for Reading Success* provides a focus on the development of phonemic awareness. This is consistent with his belief that: 'If a student is not attuned to the sounds within oral words, there is no efficient way to anchor sounds to letters for printed words to become familiar letter strings.' He defines phoneme awareness as 'a critical cognitive/linguistic skill needed to store words for immediate, effortless retrieval' and establishes it as an essential determinant for the development of word fluency. He is very pointed in explaining that sight word knowledge is not a visual process, although he reminds us that visual skills are needed for learning the critically important letter-sound associations, the basis of phonics. Beyond that, word recognition is reliant on the recognition of letter strings which correlate with the oral strings of phonemes in words. It is this matching of letter strings and pronunciation which gives meaning to allow anchoring points in memory for word retrieval at lightning speed. This is dependent upon students

having well developed phonemic skills so that phonemes can be unconsciously matched 'behind the scenes' with automaticity.

Kilpatrick uses acronyms to describe how letter sequences become meaningful when they match the stored sequence within the known word string. In Australia we could use AFL as a meaningful sequence of letters corresponding to words, yet LFA or FAL have no meaning. In words, the attachment of letters to phonemes provides the anchoring point for meaning which plays a critical role in allowing words to be stored in memory. Kilpatrick also uses the example of the letter sequence s-e-n-t as having meaning as it is a familiar sequential order of phonemes and finds a match in lexical memory, yet s-n-e-t does not.

We know that for good readers, familiar words are not processed in the slow, sounding-out and blending way, which is essential for phonic decoding of unfamiliar words, but rather processed as unitized meaningful word recognition which involves processing all letters simultaneously with the glance of an eye. Perhaps this is a little like broadband input rather than parallel port. Familiar strings become internalized as sight words and allow for fluent reading.

Part 3 of *Equipped for Reading Success* provides a very practical, step-by-step program for phonemic awareness development. As often repeated throughout the text, "there is no place for students to get 'stuck'". It is this carefully scaffolded sequence of skill development which contributes to much of the success of the program – students readily engage with what they can succeed in. The program of 800 one-minute exercises of carefully graded skill progression is a gift for busy teachers who can pick-up-and-go with no need for prior planning as the instructional content is all there, appropriate for all tiers of RTI and across both specialist and mainstream sectors. Having read the introduction to the training exercises, teachers are prepared to dive into the program.

Formal assessment is not necessary as entry points can be established by gauging student performance at different levels. More formal assessment and entry points can be determined by use of the Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST) found in the Appendix. For a more comprehensive assessment, Kilpatrick recommends that the PAST

is used alongside the Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPPS) so that working memory and rapid naming as well as phonological awareness and oral blending are assessed. Interestingly, Kilpatrick has found that where results differ, the PAST is usually more consistent than the Elision sub-test of the CTOPPS with a student's reading skill.

A significant point of difference in this program is the importance it places on proficiency, as determined by timing. This is emphasized at a phonological level, a letter-sound level and finally at a word level. Timed assessment and training exercises are used to determine skill level. While many programs and assessment tools assess similar skills and knowledge, they do not often do this under timed conditions. It is this element that Kilpatrick asserts is the key to proficiency. A student may be able to match letters and sounds, and to isolate phonemes within words, but unless this is done with automaticity, the skill will not be considered proficient enough to support orthographic mapping and fluent word level reading.

Overall, Equipped for Reading Success is an insightful and relevant guide for teachers on how to incorporate new understandings from reading research into classroom practice.

Adding further value to the text, there are full chapters on both letter-sound learning and word study which guide the teaching of these additional elements of orthographic mapping. Concrete strategies and activities are numerous outlined to provide a comprehensive program to promote rapid, effortless word retrieval and fluency. This text provides an easy to follow 'recipe' for the teaching of reading, with practical 'ingredient' lists for lesson activities based on current research. Teachers want strategies and resources, especially where new directions and modifications to current teaching practices are promoted. *Equipped for Reading Success* will not disappoint. Further activity and word lists are plentiful in the appendix, along with a comprehensive glossary.

Kilpatrick challenges some popular beliefs. In line with his exposition on

how students learn to read, he has questioned the need for commonly used labels such as 'dyslexia' and 'learning disability'. In a chapter devoted to 'Remediation, Learning Disabilities, Dyslexia and Response to Intervention (RTI)' he suggests a better way of viewing word-reading disabilities than using labels. Using graphic outlines, he presents the core skills of word recognition along a continuum. This forms the template on which to map the profile of a student with reading difficulties. Immediately, strengths and skill deficits are highlighted. Kilpatrick asserts that the most efficient way to address reading difficulties is to target remediation toward skill deficits. Hence, he claims there is no need for labelling. This view may be unpopular with families who find that terms such as dyslexia can raise the profile of struggling readers' needs within schools and workplaces.

Perhaps a greater challenge to conventional practice is his contention that a phonic approach to reading should be delayed until students reach a full alphabetic stage, at which point students will have the skills to map every sound-letter combination in words at their level. Kilpatrick recommends a linguistic approach to reading, which he likens to 'training wheels', being a developmentally more appropriate starting point than phonics. He explains that the linguistic approach uses onset and rime units rather than the more cognitively and phonologically demanding all-through-the-word sounding out, and that the approach will '*...allow children to begin reading connected text and short stories while their basic phoneme-level skills are developing*', yet he does not elaborate further. This contrasts with his very generous elaborations in other areas relevant to reading and is likely to leave the reader feeling a little short-served in this respect. Decodable program materials usually available to teachers and commonly used are mostly based on a phonic approach.

Overall, *Equipped for Reading Success* is an insightful and relevant guide for teachers on how to incorporate new understandings from reading research into classroom practice. The practical nature of the text is easy to adopt for classroom use and is sure to lead to positive reading outcomes for almost all young learners. It is a text for the prevention of reading difficulties as well as for correcting serious reading problems. This is a bold text that

presents controversial views alongside clear direction for effective teaching. Throughout, Kilpatrick expresses concern that the continuation of teaching practices that are not based on the science of reading will continue to cause unnecessary failure for students and that this situation can be prevented. We strongly support this view and recommend this text.

Kate Munro is an LDA Consultant member located in Mudgee, NSW, and Ann Ryan is a long-standing member of LDA and Convenor of the LDA Consultants Committee.