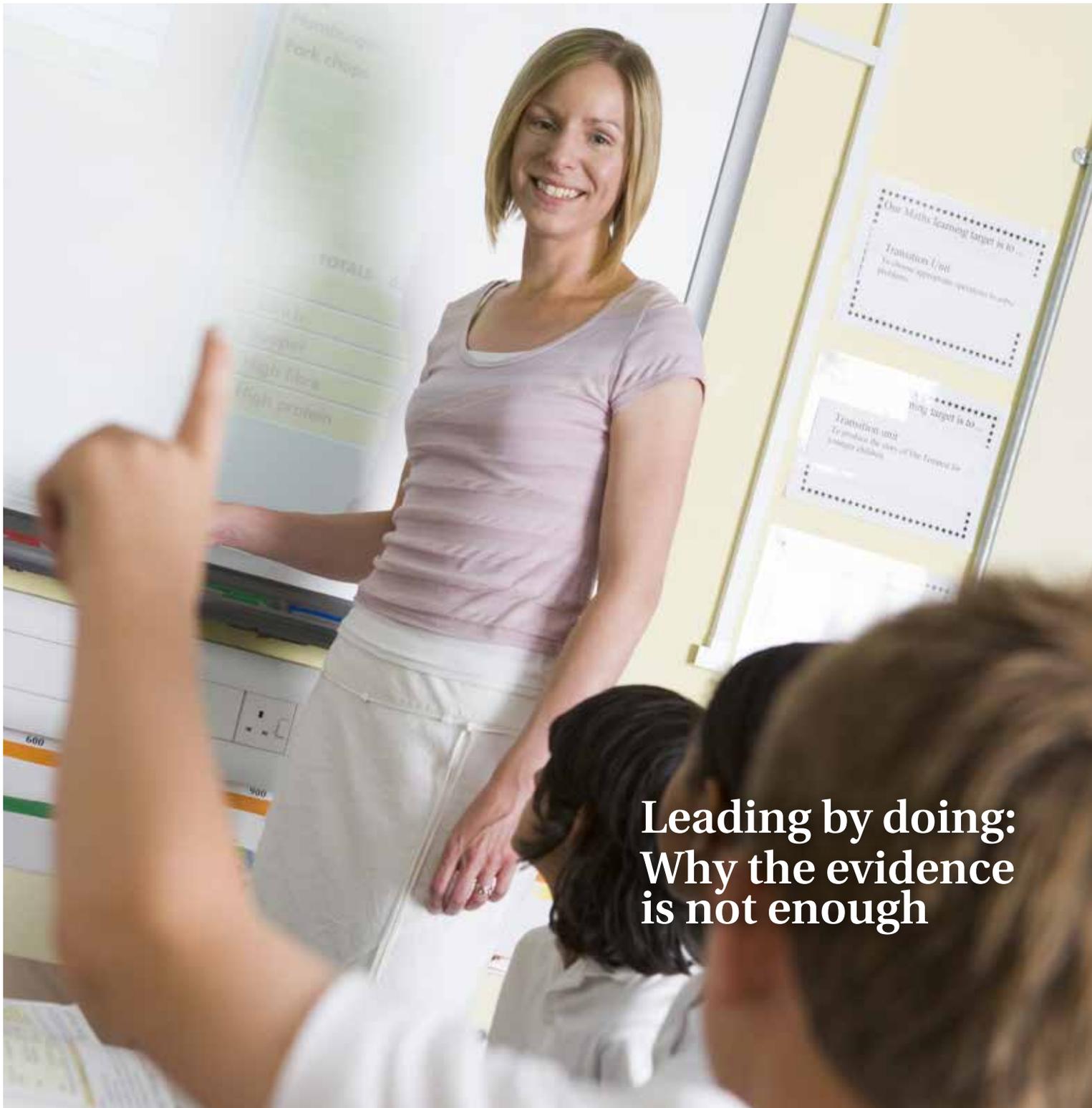


# Bulletin



**Leading by doing:  
Why the evidence  
is not enough**

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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**

The Bulletin is produced by the Bulletin Team at Learning Difficulties Australia. Members of the team are Wendy Moore, Robyn Wheldall, Nicole Todd, Roslyn Neilson, Tanya Forbes, Pamela Snow and Molly de Lemos. We welcome the submission of articles from LDA members and others with an interest in learning difficulties for possible inclusion in upcoming editions of this Bulletin.

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# From the President

## Anne Castles

This is my first report as incoming President of Learning Difficulties Australia, and I feel extremely proud and privileged to be at the helm of such an important organisation. My role is made easier by the fact that I inherit an organisation that is strong, vibrant and steadily growing: Memberships have been increasing year on year and we now have over 600 members. Clearly, teachers and other professionals value LDA's role in supporting them to assist students with learning difficulties, and I will do my best over my tenure to ensure that this continues. The excellent shape that LDA is currently in is due in no small part to the outstanding leadership of Dr Lorraine Hammond over the past two years, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for her hard work and commitment.

I come into this role in what is a particularly key time in terms of policy and practice for children with learning difficulties in Australia. In December this year, the Education Council will meet to discuss the introduction of a National Literacy and Numeracy Check for Year 1 children, including a phonics screen. This proposal comes on the back of the 2016 Australian Government report, *Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes*, which called for an evidence-based approach to school reform, and after clear recommendations from the 2017 Expert Advisory Panel on Year 1 Literacy and Numeracy Assessment chaired by LDA Council Member, Dr Jennifer Buckingham.

The Year 1 Check aims to improve learning outcomes for all Australian students, and to ensure that those who are behind in their schooling are identified early and can receive the extra support they need. The phonics component is a short "light-

touch" assessment administered by the classroom teacher, requiring the children to read aloud a set of 40 simple words and nonsense words (the inclusion of nonsense words being important as they assess children's ability to apply their phonics skills to new material). The check will take no more than 5-10 minutes to administer, and my bet is that most children won't notice the difference between this test and other activities and assessments they are regularly participating in in the classroom, let alone be distressed by it.

Despite its simplicity, efficiency, and power to provide informative data about children's progress in a key learning area, the proposal to introduce a phonics screen has met with huge controversy, and no small amount of fearmongering. Interestingly, the range of objections falls into two broad categories: The first is, "Australia doesn't need this test as we already teach and assess phonics well", and the second is, "Australia doesn't need this test as teaching phonics is not important for learning to read." Clearly both of these can't be the case!

Learning Difficulties Australia strongly supports the introduction of a Year 1 phonics screen, and were signatories to an open letter to all State Ministers of Education urging them to embrace this reform at the Education Council meeting held in December. I hope that my next President's Report will bring with it good news regarding the outcome, and that Australia will have made a positive step in improving outcomes for all children, and particularly those at risk for learning difficulties.



# LDA Award Winners for 2017

The following award recipients were recognised at our recent AGM in Melbourne, and each presented an informative and engaging address to the meeting.

## AJLD Eminent Researcher Award 2017: Professor Anne Castles

*The AJLD Eminent Researcher Award, funded by Routledge, publisher of the Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties, recognises significant contributions to research in the area of learning difficulties and promotes high quality research papers for the Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties.*

Anne Castles is Distinguished Professor at Macquarie University. She is a cognitive scientist and an expert in development and disorders of reading and language. For over 20 years she has been contributing important research in this area, sharing this research with the scientific community and the wider community.

As well as being a researcher, Anne is a passionate and active advocate for students with learning difficulties and for ensuring that they are supported by evidence-based interventions and effective support. She is active in the print and electronic media and uses social media very effectively to translate and promote key messages from her own research and from other important research undertaken elsewhere.

Anne completed her Honours degree in Psychology at the Australian National University and her PhD at

Macquarie University, supervised by another LDA eminent researcher, Professor Max Coltheart. She undertook teaching and research at the University of Melbourne before returning to Macquarie University. She has been recognised with an innovation award for the development of the MOTif assessment interface, a fabulous tool which many LDA members will have made use of.

In 2010, Anne became the Scientific Director of the Macquarie Centre for Cognitive Science and then Head of the Department of Cognitive Science. In 2011, she became the Deputy Director and Reading Program Leader for the ARC Centre of Excellence in Cognition and its Disorders.

Anne has led and contributed to important research projects through ARC grants, has published many influential articles and books, has supervised and supported postgraduate students, and has served on the editorial boards of influential academic journals including *Annals of Dyslexia*, the *Journal*

of Child Experimental Psychology, and the *Scientific Studies of Reading*.

Anne is a Fellow of the Royal Society of New South Wales and a member of the Steering Committee of the Australian Brain Alliance. Anne has been on the Council of Learning Difficulties Australia since 2009, and has now accepted the position of president of our association for the coming year. We are very privileged to have Anne's expertise on Council.

She is a very deserving recipient of the AJLD Eminent Researcher Award.

*Wendy Moore, Publications Convenor, Learning Difficulties Australia*

## Mona Tobias Award 2017: Professor Pamela Snow

*The Mona Tobias Award is presented 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.*

Pamela is Professor and Head of the Rural Health School at the Bendigo campus of La Trobe University. She is both a registered psychologist and a Fellow of the Speech Pathology Association of Australia. Throughout her academic career her focus has been on speech and language difficulties and how these impact on individuals, particularly those at risk, including youth offenders and young people in the state care system. Her research interests include oral language as an academic and mental health protective factor in childhood and adolescence, as well as the application of evidence in the language-to-literacy transition in the early years of school.

Pamela's research has been reported in over 120 publications in a wide range of international journals. Her most recent publication is a book, co-authored with Caroline Bowen, on *Making Sense of Interventions for Children with Developmental Disorders*:



*Professor Anne Castles receives the AJLD Eminent Researcher Award from Routledge Taylor and Francis Managing Editor Eloise Moir-Ford at the Awards Ceremony in October.*

A Guide for Parents and Professionals, which I had the honour of being asked to launch earlier this year with Ellen Fanning; fame at last! This witty and accessible book provides an invaluable guide for parents and professionals in distinguishing between programs and interventions that are based on research and evidence, as against those that are not.

Pamela has played a leading role within the Australian academic community in identifying and commenting on issues of significance relating to the link between literacy and educational outcomes, and the impact of poor literacy skills for young people in the justice and welfare sectors.

Through her wonderful blog, the Snow Report, and articles published in the Conversation, she has drawn attention to critical issues relating to effective literacy instruction in schools and the importance of evidence-based practice. She has been a member of the Expert Committee set up by the Government to advise on the implementation of then proposed Phonics Check in Year 1.

Pamela has also contributed to the support of students with learning difficulties through her membership of LDA Council, and through her many publications which address the needs of children and adolescents who have difficulties because of poor language and reading skills.

Professor Pamela Snow has made an outstanding contribution to the study of learning difficulties in Australia.

*Kevin Wheldall, AM, Emeritus  
Professor Macquarie University*

## Bruce Wicking Award 2017: Mr Chris Eveans

*Bruce Wicking was committed to the provision of programs which catered for the individual needs of children with learning difficulties. The award is made possible by the generosity of the Wicking family and friends. The award recognises an individual or organisation for innovative programs or practices relating to the teaching of children with learning difficulties.*

Chris has been in education for 38 years; most of these years have been as a school principal. He has been Principal at Robina State School on the Gold Coast for 6 years, and prior to that Chris was principal at Birkdale South State School in Brisbane for 19 years. Chris has also worked at remote indigenous schools in Queensland.

Chris has been instrumental in translating education research into classroom practice. He has implemented highly effective literacy instruction based on the three key inquiries into reading – the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (2010), The National Reading Panel (2000) and the Rose Report (2009). The pedagogy at Robina State School is based on explicit instruction using multisensory techniques, integrated with the Big 6 of Reading (oral language, phonemic awareness, synthetic phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension). Chris has taken a whole school approach, by inspiring teachers and managing school resources, so evidence based teaching practices have been embraced by his teachers and feature prominently in every classroom.

Chris leads by example with a collaborative culture of professional learning at Robina State School. Chris has developed a high level of expertise in education research through his own personal learning and by connecting with leading education researchers, including Louisa Moats, Anita Archer, John Munro, Lorraine Hammond and Bartek Rajkowski. Both instructional coaching and expert coaching enable teachers to incorporate evidence-based instructional practices into their teaching. Teacher knowledge and skills are improved by setting professional goals, modelling of best practice, engaging in a supportive dialogue and classroom observations with feedback.

Chris is willing to share his wealth of knowledge and experience by mentoring schools, presenting at seminars and writing publications. Chris has visited many progressive schools to observe best teaching practice, as well as being a source of inspiration by hosting many local and interstate schools. He has presented seminars at the Australian Council of Education Research ACER 'Excellence in Professional Practice' conference and has written articles for the Learning Difficulties Australia Bulletin. Chris works in partnership with professional associations and community groups to host professional development seminars, parent information sessions and children's workshops at his school.

The unique learning needs of students with learning difficulties are carefully considered so every student has an opportunity to participate on the same basis as their peers. Chris ensures instruction and intervention is tailored to

suit the learning needs of the individual child and he interacts personally with every student in his school. Student learning is supported and scaffolded through differentiated teaching, classroom accommodations, universal design for learning, assistive technology and the provision of reasonable adjustments. Chris has taken many enrolments from families in despair. His approach has restored the self-esteem of many children and restored their parents' faith in education. He always puts the best interests and welfare of the child first and foremost.

Chris facilitated the establishment of Robina State School as a pilot 'dyslexia-friendly' school based on the recommendations of the National Dyslexia Working Party Report, 2010. In recognition of this innovation, it became the first school accredited by the Australian Dyslexia Association in 2012. This prototype was endorsed by the Queensland Education Minister, the Hon. John Paul Langbroek, as a model for other schools to replicate.

At the heart of the school's improvement agenda is the credo: EARLY, EARLY, EARLY with a focus on early prevention, early identification and early intervention to prevent reading failure. Chris advocates that best teaching for children with dyslexia benefits ALL children. The exemplary teaching and leadership at Robina State School is showcased in the "Outside the Square" professional learning films.

Chris Eveans is a proactive educator and visionary school leader deserving of formal recognition for bringing education research to the classroom so every student at Robina State School has an opportunity to attain their learning potential.

Chris is a very worthy recipient of the LDA Bruce Wicking Award.

*Tania Forbes, Dyslexia campaigner and  
former LDA Council member*



Chris Eveans

# Leading by doing: Why the evidence is not enough

Contributing to the education of Australian children with learning difficulties is the job of all teachers and principals. But the **“Bruce Wicking Award”** from Learning Difficulties Australia, which deems my contribution to be innovative in nature, is an acknowledgement of my work as a teacher and principal that I am honoured to receive.

Like LDA, an organisation that evolved from a Diagnostic and Remedial Teachers Association, my work in leading the teaching of reading has advanced over the course of my 38 years in education. Understanding intervention as a **prevention-based model** (to avoid failure) as opposed to **remediation** (to correct or make right) was a game changer. And **shifting my view of deficit** from the children to a deficit in the fundamentals for success, namely deep knowledge of language and explicit instruction by teachers, became a catalyst for change.

What then followed was my determination to chart the research on the teaching of reading, thus raising questions that I found inspirational in nature:

- What is critical for students with learning difficulties?
- What is essential for all students?
- And could the evidence facilitate success for ALL?

The quest to transform a ‘dyslexia friendly school’ into a culture of high expectations for all students was deliberately reliant on - and trusting in - the science and evidence.

## School improvement

The premise of my commitment to **school improvement** was to embed a scientific, research-based teaching practice of reading that was essential for all students, but critical for students with learning difficulties. Consequently, the mud map towards this innovation became simple to envisage: clearly defined by the research and powerfully supported by the evidence, it was a no-brainer. It was simple to explain, simple to write about, simple to defend, simple to request, and often simple to recognize in action and data.

But despite the overwhelming evidence, commitment to evidence was not always enough. It was certainly **not enough to shift embedded beliefs and traditional practices that resist innovation**. The evidence was not always motivating. And the opportunity for improvement was not enough to sustain long term change. Deliberately focussing efforts to achieve the precise

innovation, when and where you need or desire, is not easy. It requires shared leadership, deep knowledge, strong analysis and creative thinking to advance, as well as perseverance and boldness to implement.

So, for me, some new and equally important questions were:

- Can an evidence-based argument influence and alter traditional teaching practices?
- How do we innovate to shift embedded personal beliefs about learning and teaching?
- What new measures, new methods or new devices, or dare I say, unconventionalities are required?
- And how long will it take?

## Success for all

It was mid 2013, and three Year 2 boys, Nicholas, Mason and Hunter, were failing to thrive in reading under an experienced and empathetic teacher. Two of these boys would go on to be formally identified as students with dyslexia. And the teacher herself, a Reading Recovery teacher, completed *Orton-Gillingham* training. The teacher used a commercial product designed for intervention that **explicitly taught structured, synthetic phonics using multisensory instruction and highly engaging texts**, and trialled it with these Year 2 students. It was the success of this program that ignited the first change in direction for classroom teaching of reading to enable success for all students at our school.

Alongside this, all teachers participated in an online learning course, *Understanding Dyslexia*. Its purpose was to educate as well as debunk any doubts teachers held about dyslexia. It provided an exemplary model for the teaching of reading for all students. In addition, Dr. Gavin Reid presented a session to our staff on *Dyslexia – Meeting the needs of all*, also contributing to our knowledge.

A third revelation clinched the deal for teaching structured synthetic phonics in all classrooms. Craig Wright’s *Understanding Words* program was being used by the school’s Learning Support Teacher with some students without us fully knowing its potential for all. Finally, the yearly failure of 25% of Prep and Year 1 students, low expectations and the lack of alignment of intervention with classroom teaching, all contributed to the school’s decision to shift to evidence-based practice incorporating Anne Bayetto’s *BIG 6 of Language and Literacy Learning* – not just the adding on of teaching phonics.

## Early, early, early

At the start of 2014, the research and the evidence from three national reports was shared with Prep and Year 1 teachers at Robina State School, under the heading **Why Reading? Why the Early Years? Why Systematic, Synthetic Phonics?**

The reports were the Rowe report (*Australian National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy*, 2005), the Rose report (*UK Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading*, 2006) and the *US National Reading Panel Report*, 2000.

At that time, the **personal beliefs of teachers** in the early years at our school varied from ‘children learn to read naturally’ to ‘Prep is too young for formal literacy instruction’ to ‘if only the children did their home reading’. And on the question of phonological awareness, teachers responded with ‘What’s that?’ and ‘How could I possibly teach that to a whole class?’. These closely held **low expectations** for students of disadvantaged backgrounds clashed with the evidence that, with few exceptions, all students can learn to read, but not by themselves.

The research that I shared with staff was accompanied by statements of **moral purpose**. I explained that reading competence is foundational not only for school-based learning but well-being, further education and occupational success and emphasized that there is good evidence that quality teaching can transform a child’s performance, even for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The research that I shared also emphasised the need for instructional changes. I made the point that students learn best when teachers adopt an integrated approach to reading that explicitly teaches phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary knowledge and comprehension. I also pointed out that unlike whole language approaches, code-based methods typically require a high degree of teacher-centred presentation of learning materials, with an emphasis on explicit instruction, scheduled practice and feedback.

But it was this concept of early, repeated often in the research, that captured our focus and led to our **Early, Early, Early strategy of Early Identification, Early Assessment and Early Intervention**.

## National assessment

Recommendations in the *Australian National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy* (Rowe, 2005) included:

- Assessment of all children by their teachers at **school entry** and

regularly during the **early years of schooling** is of critical importance to the teaching of reading, and to **identify children who are at risk** of making inadequate progress

- **Early identification** of children experiencing difficulties means **support** can be put in place **early**
- **Early assessment** should be a key element of responsible system and school literacy **planning and monitoring**.

It could be argued that a national Year 1 Term 3 phonics screen might be too little, too late. I wonder whether there will be the danger of leaving the deficit with the child and implementing low probability remediation rather than acknowledging the deficit in the knowledge, instruction and/or early intervention required for success? I also wonder how accurate and valuable the data would be with the assessment in the hands of teachers disengaged from the research and confused by the evidence? And what tool will be used?

### Dibels

At our school, **DIBELS** (*Dynamic indicators of basic early literacy skills*, University of Oregon) was the data tool used to closely monitor the acquisition of literacy skills as part of our Early, Early strategy. The suite of literacy assessments features quick, reliable and valid measures for teachers to:

- Predict early reading success
- Identify students needing intervention
- Evaluate effectiveness of interventions
- Select instructional interventions and groups

- Provide universal screening, progress monitoring and diagnostic assessment.

DIBELS data was collected three times each year – beginning, middle and end – with monitoring undertaken between assessments for students at risk. DIBELS measures minute improvement that clearly shows if a child is on a **trajectory of sustained improvement to meet the next benchmark**. Early indications of learning difficulties are considered alongside possible developmental delays.

Despite the evidence and the powerful and efficient nature of the tool, initial attempts by classroom teachers resulted in invalid data through significant inconsistency and a resistance to engage with the research or understand the data and its implications for instruction.

### Tiered response to intervention

One school expert was trained and employed to collect DIBELS data on phonemic awareness (PSF), alphabetic principle (NWF) and accurate and fluent reading (ORF). The data (Figure 1.) were presented to teachers in student groups using a response to intervention methodology. Teachers used DIBELS data to:

- predict success early
- identify students needing intervention; and
- plan instruction for each group.

DIBELS data were used to **evaluate and align the effectiveness of our interventions occurring inside and outside the classroom**. This early and frequent use of data enabled intervention to provide a ‘prevention-based model’ through the early identification of

students at risk of making inadequate progress, and the provision of support early and responsibly.

The intervention employed a response to intervention model consisting of three tiers, often represented as a pyramid.

- Tier 1 - Core instruction
- Tier 2 - Core + Targeted instruction
- Tier 3 –Core + Intensive instruction

Tier 1 students are identified early and require core instruction (whole class with some extension).

The targeted instruction for Tier 2 students often includes repeated practice to improve automaticity and to avoid what the research and the evidence describes as “instructional causalities”. For students with **English as a second language**, it is important to ask whether the problem is phonological awareness or oral language comprehension.

Meanwhile the early identification of Tier 3 students alerted teachers to the need for early intervention and more **teacher-led** explicit teaching, regular checking for understanding and progress monitoring. All students need **guarding of self-esteem**, because even at Prep level students notice early when they are not keeping up with their peers.

The three-tiered response to intervention model **flipped the role of the teacher aide in classrooms**. Using guidelines for repeated practice and training in instructional routines, TAs worked with Tier 2 students. Meanwhile **Tier 3 students** worked in small groups **with the teacher** providing intensive instruction.

### Data conflicting with practice

By June 2014, a review of the Prep Semester 1 data showed a remarkable spike in the improvement of spelling, but not in reading. Fast forward to August and my visit to a Prep classroom included the observation of a teacher listening to a child read. It was the word ‘garage’ in the sentence he was having trouble with. The teacher’s response was to use the picture to help the child ‘read’ the word. Meanwhile I was thinking: Have we taught the two sounds represented by the letter ‘g’? And isn’t that a two-syllable word? And is ‘garage’ a word in this child’s vocabulary?

Both the data and the observed teaching practice highlighted conflicting pedagogies. We were teaching multi-sensory, explicit synthetic phonics but teaching and assessing reading using the three-cueing system. **No wonder the children were encoding beyond**

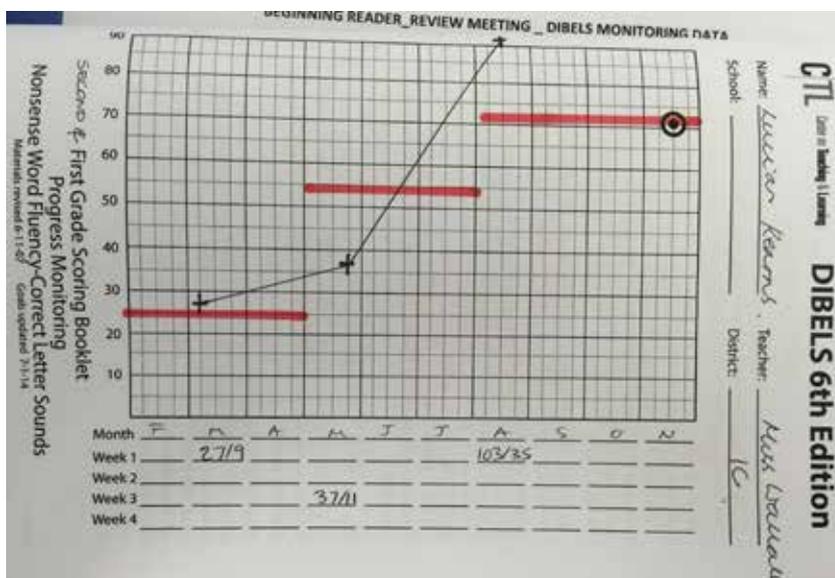


Figure 1. DIBELS Monitoring Tool showing improvement to achieve next benchmark.

**expectations but not improving in decoding.** This is when the data showed a conflict between the goals and the practice. Knowing that an evidence-based argument wasn't going to alter the practice of this Prep teacher, and many other hard working staff members who had successfully taught many students to read, I went looking for a **practical and powerful solution.**

I used the Youtube clip from the *spelfabet* website of Alison Clarke, a speech pathologist from Melbourne who specializes in early literacy difficulties, to **expose the 'guessing the word' strategy of our levelled readers** to staff during a staff meeting.

Alison clearly showed how a predictable text (with repeated sentence structure and picture clues) tricks us into thinking that children can read. She also showed how the levelled text can exceed the teaching sequence of synthetic phonics, in both letter/sound relationships and in the complexity of the word structure e.g. CVC to CCCVC words.

The outcome was the bold decision to **remove all levelled readers from classrooms** and replace them with decodable readers - an innovative move for these enlightened early years' teachers, and one that they are now reluctant to reverse, now that they understand the research in action in their own classrooms.

### Simple view of reading

It was a powerful moment for early years' teachers as they adopted and understood the **Simple View of Reading** that allowed them to let go of their traditional teacher practices using the three-cueing system and the measurement of reading achievement based on a number or level. The staff are to be complimented on their bravery to jump ship, though I imagined many still harboured copies of PM assessment kits in classrooms, like security blankets – just in case!

However, it was not long after the introduction of decodable readers that teachers reported on the hard work children were doing using their phonic knowledge and skills of segmenting and blending to decode the words off the page. The children were reading and the explicit and multi-sensory teaching was working. The result was a **huge shakeup of mindsets on assessment of reading** as teachers moved from:

- checking to see what the children have learnt – Levelled Reader
- to checking if instruction on reading has been effective – Decodable Reader

This was about **classroom teachers understanding the impact of their instruction** and being prepared to evaluate their teaching, shifting teacher energy from efficiency to effectiveness, from teaching to learning.

### Learning by doing

*Learn by Doing* became our motto each time we faced a new challenge, a new departure from tradition.

A willingness to **experiment through action research** is important for the success of any innovation.

Further to synthetic phonics and decoding, teachers were confronted with another new concept: **fluency (accuracy, rate and prosody)** and a new instructional routine of practice using **repeated reading.** Despite the research on fluency as a bridge to comprehension, the idea of counting the number of words a child read correctly in a minute and using repeated practice to improve reading rate was one 'unconventionality' that many Year 4 to 6 teachers resisted. And the explicit teaching of prosody through echo reading to model what good reading sounds like had been absent from traditional teaching practices of my upper school teachers.

Despite the initial push back, *Six minute solution: A reading fluency program* (Adams & Brown) was purchased and implemented. When the evidence is not enough, finding the resources to implement the research, i.e. **learning by doing**, can sometimes be the answer. Use of the *Hasbrouck-Tindal oral reading fluency chart*, as determined by data collected by Jan Hasbrouck and Gerald Tindal, provided fluency norms for oral reading fluency rates for students in grades 1 through 8. The teachers used this table to draw conclusions and make decisions about the oral reading fluency of their students. The table can also be used to set the long-term fluency goals for both able and struggling readers.

### Rocket science

The teaching of reading is **highly intellectual and analytical work** that raises questions such as:

- Are our teachers and leaders up to the task?
- How do we support the teaching profession with this upheaval and departure from what they have always done?

Our pedagogical framework aspired to make **every teacher the right teacher – reducing the variance between and across classrooms.**

- **Professional learning occurred on site as we worked together – learning by doing.** We had to remove the expert blind spot of the proficient adult reader. Teachers usually come from a background of being successful students at school and may be unaware of the difficulties in learning to read, the impact on well-being and the long-term implications.
- **Explicit Teaching** whilst critical is made impotent by a lack of **deep knowledge of language and literacy** and the relationship between the BIG 6 of Reading by which to teach, monitor progress, assess reading and provide intervention.
- **Coaching with observation and feedback is critical.** You simply cannot teach what you don't know. And learning what good teaching looks like is best done through peer observation.
- The *Cognitive Foundations in Learning to Read* framework (Hoover and Gough) was used to build deep pedagogical content knowledge regarding the simple view of reading, namely that *decoding* and *oral language comprehension* provide **the two pillars of reading comprehension.**

### Ten point plan

Dyslexia, like other learning disabilities, is recognised under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) as a disability. Under the DDA and its subordinate legislation, *Disability Standards for Education 2005*, all schools are required to identify barriers to student learning, including dyslexia, and make educational responses to ensure the student can access and participate at school on the same basis as other students.

Our school was fortunate to have a strong and sustained advocacy of caring and very knowledgeable parents that encouraged us to continually reflect on what it meant to be 'dyslexia friendly' while I worked on how to achieve a schoolwide model to explicitly teach reading using scientifically-based reading research methods and the significant deep pedagogical content knowledge that expert teachers of reading should know and be able to do.

Teachers came to understand dyslexia as a learning disability that is neurologically based, genetic in nature and lifelong. Teachers also realised that learning difficulties as a result of dyslexia are frequently resistant to change, and that most children with

dyslexia have normal intelligence, while some are gifted.

To this end, the following 10 actions to support students with dyslexia and to build an even more 'dyslexia friendly' school environment were proposed in 2014 and fully implemented by 2016:

1. Identify students with dyslexia
2. Explicit instruction as central to our Pedagogical Framework
3. Set S.M.A.R.T. learning goals for monitoring progress in the classroom Years 4-6
4. Classroom accommodations
5. Reasonable adjustments for assessment
6. Participation in intensive reading intervention Years 3-6
7. Professional development for teachers
8. Assistive Technology for Years 5 & 6
9. Social Emotional Program for Years 5 & 6
10. On-site Reading Tuition

### Leading the learning

As with the evolution of the LDA, my responsibilities and priorities as a principal changed with the shift of emphasis from principal as administrator to principal as instructional leader using scientific research and evidence. Principals need to **lead the learning of language and literacy** to ignite and sustain a shift to evidence-based teaching of reading in their school and **influence change** not only on their school site but also at the systems level. As the leader, a principal needs to be the **expert on their school site and build deep knowledge** for shared leadership. And as they put

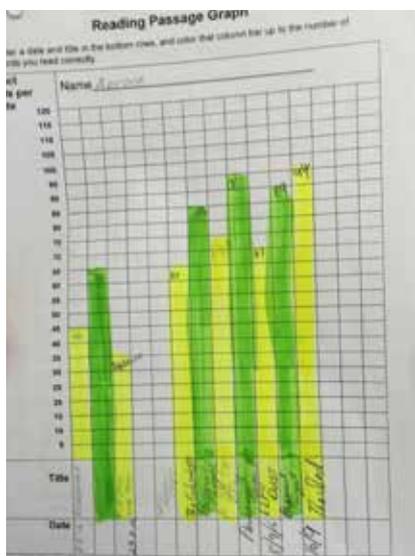


Figure 2. Oral reading fluency (ORF) mapping.

the research into practice, a coherent vision for learning to read will evolve and guide instruction and intervention. Making every teacher the right teacher, whilst a seemingly impossible task, is worthwhile, requiring **trust in your teachers** and highly innovative and courageous leadership.

### How long does it take?

How long does it take to achieve improvement? At our school, improvement was evident very early. DIBELS data showed speedy and significant improvement for Prep students in **phoneme segmentation fluency PSF**, needed for both **decoding and encoding**, and in **nonsense word fluency NWF**, which indicates achievement of the **alphabetic principle**. Likewise, we improved in our **identification of students** needing **early intervention** to prevent failure.

**Oral reading fluency (ORF)** is required for **comprehension** and was mapped for Year 1 students (Fig. 2) and again improvement was immediate and measurable. Year 2 to 6 teachers implemented the 6-minute solution to **Oral Reading Fluency** as part of **daily reading practice** and measured weekly improvement, while multisyllabic word reading and spelling was part of a future improvement agenda.

The Early, Early, Early strategy achieved the most significant improvement in number of children in Prep and Year 1 achieving classroom targets and school improvement priorities in word knowledge, decoding and encoding and oral reading fluency. The **yearly failure of 25% of Prep and Year 1 students plummeted to 0 requiring out of classroom intervention**, except for new enrolments in Year 1 only.

The School Improvement premise **to embed a scientific, research-based teaching practice of reading** was realised through the development and implementation of **evidence-based Achievement Standards for English for Prep to Year 6**. The achievement standards reflected a systematic, structured explicit teaching, learning and assessment of reading that aligned classroom targets, school improvement priorities and National Standardised tests – providing strong internal accountability.

But how long it take? As one principal said to me – until you die! Be aware that some teachers can persevere through change, thinking that it will all go away at some point and they can return to entrenched practices.

### Students at the centre

Restructuring the teaching of reading to embed evidence-based practices, while rethinking a Dyslexia Friendly School by recasting success as **“success for all” children**, required strong **moral purpose, intellectual maturity and effective change management** in leadership.

Meanwhile, the lack of understanding of the innovative nature of the work at this school by the region was professionally limiting and frustrating. A system needs to support pioneering efforts that seek to use the research. But more importantly, for the innovations to be sustained for continuous improvement, any incoming principal at this school will need to possess **responsible, intellectual sensibilities and courageous instructional leadership**. It is critical that new leaders at this school are not tempted to return to practices they are comfortable with, or merely superimpose a model from their past experiences, thus abandoning the students. Measuring student reading achievement with non-evidenced based tools such as the ubiquitous reading levels will be a big step backwards for the highly progressive teachers at this school. Or narrowing the improvement focus on U2B students for NAPLAN will only produce superficial progress for some students. And streaming - both detrimental and inequitable. And where is the **evidence?** Without the DIBELS or another evidence-based tool or practice to collect **data to drive decisions**, the early identification, early assessment and early intervention will not occur. And the most vulnerable will be left behind.

**Students at the centre** means most children achieve, alongside responsible leadership that responds quickly for those needing intervention to prevent failure. It's about the students, not about the teachers or the leaders. **It's about success for ALL!** Except the evidence is not enough.

*This article is based on the presentation Chris made to the annual general meeting of LDA in October 2017 on receiving the Bruce Wicking Award for innovation in education for students with learning difficulties. Chris has recently retired as principal of Robina State School in Queensland.*

# Achieving whole-school support for students with learning difficulties – Ten things to consider

**Robyn Wheldall**

**P**roviding support to children who struggle to learn at the same rate as their peers is a perennial and challenging problem for schools. It is clear that some children will take longer to master the basic skills required for higher order learning and teachers have to accommodate the learning needs of these students as well as others who are progressing at a more typical rate. This is hard to do in a class of students but a coherent whole-school approach can help ensure that all (or the vast majority of) children are being provided with the support that they need in school.

There are some guiding principles that can help schools deliver the support required, summarised below as the 10 Cs.

1. **Conviction** – The first prerequisite for an effective whole-school approach is the belief or conviction that *all* children can learn. We need to resist the temptation to rush to identify ‘within child’ problems as the reason for learning difficulties. Obviously, there are some children who have endogenous conditions that make learning more difficult but there are many more children who are struggling who don’t. Difficulties

may arise that have more to do with the environment that the child is in, rather than some characteristic of the learner. Similarly, we should be cautious about explaining a child’s difficulties by aspects of their home environment or background. While what goes on at home can be an important factor in a child’s learning journey, we don’t have control of the home environments of children who struggle. But we do have control over what occurs at school. And what occurs at school can be powerful indeed. We are wise to bear in mind that familiar idiom, “If the student hasn’t learned, the teacher hasn’t taught”. In other words, the buck stops with us.

2. **Champion** – Appointing a champion for a cause is an important part of leadership. This has to come ‘from the top’. The Principal must drive a whole-school approach by nominating an effective learning support champion. In addition, the Principal must commit to having adequate time and resources dedicated to learning support across the school. As in any venture that we undertake in the school system, the need for a committed school leadership is absolutely essential. Principals and their executive need to make sure that adequate resources are made available and that learning support is a priority for the school.
3. **Commitment** – Time and resources (human and material) have to be committed to learning support if it is to be successful. Providing a child

with a weekly half hour or hourly session of learning support is just not going to do it. Frequent instruction (and



repeated exposure) is required for most students who have learning difficulties. Managing resources is a key element in making sure that the right support is delivered in the right ‘dosage’ for a successful whole school approach. While it is tempting to try to offer support to as many children as possible at any one time, it is important to limit the size of small groups in Tier 2 interventions (see more information on Response to Intervention on page 13 of this issue). Having more than four students in a group may limit the effectiveness of the intervention. It is also important to provide a lot of resources (if needed) early on so that problems can be nipped in the bud with a bit of targeted intervention. Don’t wait for the problem to resolve itself. Go in early and go in hard. Spreading precious resources too thinly is just a waste.

**The Principal must drive a whole-school approach by nominating an effective learning support champion...**

4. **Competence** – Providing time and personnel to deliver learning support is not sufficient either. Staff members providing support need to be using evidence-based approaches. What and how it is taught *really* matters. A person with relevant special education qualifications should be responsible for the programs of all children receiving learning support across the school. This is not to say that all the delivery has to be done by special educators. Well trained and monitored para-professionals can be highly effective in delivering targeted learning support. The need for competent delivery is critical to successful intervention for learning difficulties.

### Well-trained and monitored para-professionals can be highly effective in delivering targeted learning support...

5. **Consistency** – Learning support should not occur in a vacuum. What is taught in learning support sessions should not be substantively different to what is taught in the classroom. For instance, if a student is being taught to blend and segment words in learning support using synthetic phonics, then the same approach should be evident in the classroom. It is cruel to teach a child one way in one context, and then have them try to achieve in another using different skills. More broadly, learning support should be seen as part of a continuum of all learning that is taking place in the school. The Response to Intervention framework (see page 13 in this issue for more information) helps us to conceptualise how this looks, with students moving in and out of increasingly intensive tiers of instruction depending on their need of support.
6. **Check-ups** – Monitoring student progress is a critical part of providing the right kind of support to students with learning difficulties. Identifying students who require support early is the best way of keeping the task manageable. A little bit of support early in a child's schooling can save a lot of grief (and expense) down the

track. It really is not too early to be identifying children who can receive Tier 2 (typically small group) intervention towards the end of the first year of school. How children respond to intervention needs to be continuously measured and monitored so that decisions can be made about the effectiveness of the intervention for that child – do they need to move into a more intensive tier, for example. Data-based decision-making is a critical feature of effective learning support. And data needs to be kept in a systematic way and passed on to the person teaching the child in the following year. Precious time can be lost when the learning support clock gets reset every calendar year.

7. **Communication** – It is an obvious point but still worth making that good communication between the learning support team and the classroom teacher is really important. Learning support should not be seen as something that occurs somewhere else and therefore is not relevant to what is going on in the classroom. The best outcomes will be achieved where the classroom teacher is kept updated about the progress the student is making and how developing skills may be reinforced and practised in the classroom. Apart from the obvious benefits of more practice, being able to put skills to use in another context will assist with generalisation, which can be an issue with children with learning difficulties. Moreover, a two-way conversation is important so that the classroom teacher and the learning support team can share insights and plan for the student effectively. Time for these discussions should be timetabled (and resourced) so that they happen as a matter of course, not by chance.
8. **Cooperation** – Flowing on from communication, it's clear that there has to be a high level of cooperation between the classroom teacher and the learning support team. Each needs to support the other in their work with the child, and also with the parents. An integrated and seamless form of support will give confidence to the child and their parents, an important element in keeping things positive. It can be very confronting for parents to learn that their child

is not progressing as well as would be hoped. Providing professional and caring support in this situation is very important. Agreeing on how the child's difficulties are conveyed can reduce any confusion and adds confidence that there is timely and appropriate support for the child. Remember that although you may have seen many children with learning difficulties, this might be the first time the parents have had this experience.

9. **Continuity** – For some children, the need for learning support will be ongoing. Hopefully, with evidence-based Tier 1 whole class instruction and with effective Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, the number of children requiring longer term help will be reduced. But there will be some whose needs change over time and require help in other areas. For instance, a child who struggled with decoding early on may master that skill, only to face problems with writing down the track. We need to ensure that we can provide continuity of support to meet the child at their point of need. And we need to persist. We need to model persistence and not give up. Some children need a whole lot more support to arrive at the same end point as their peers. This is not failing, it's just a longer and slower (and harder) journey. Our students need to understand the importance of persistence as it likely this will be a skill that they will need to take with them past school and into their adult life if they are to succeed.

...if a child is being taught to blend and segment in learning support...then the same approach should be evident in the classroom.

10. **Celebration** – It is easy to feel despairing at times when learning is slow and laborious. But we must look for opportunities to celebrate genuine progress. Obviously this needs to be done sensitively so that a student is not embarrassed by their relative achievements. But sustained effort, persistence and achievement should be acknowledged and celebrated. In addition, we should be seeking to find the things that the student

## An integrated and seamless form of support will give confidence to the child and their parents...

excels at so that these can be celebrated too. Experiencing difficulties with learning can be very challenging and can lead to problems of self-confidence. We need to look at the whole child and watch for signs of disengagement, school refusal, sadness and poor self-esteem. If these features are evident, the intervention approach should be stepped up to take account of this.

When considering if your school is doing all it can to optimise the learning opportunities for students who have difficulties learning, ask yourself:

- Do I (and those around me) have a conviction that **all** children can learn?
- Does my school have a champion in terms of providing effective learning support?
- Is there a real commitment of time and resources for meeting the needs of children with learning difficulties in our school?
- Are the people who are providing learning support using evidence-based approaches? Are they trained? Are they monitored if they are not qualified special educators?
- Do we check on the progress of students regularly to make sure no one is falling through the cracks? Do we check to see if interventions are being effective?
- Do we have open and effective communication between classroom teachers and the learning support team? Is there a high level of cooperation between these people?
- Do we provide ongoing support for a student's learning difficulties even though they may manifest differently over time?
- Do we celebrate the effort, achievements and strengths of our students with learning difficulties to keep them engaged?

If you can answer YES to all these questions, you are probably doing a great job in your school at supporting students with learning difficulties. Congratulations!

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# Response to Intervention: The What, the How and the Why

Lyn Franklin

The Response to Intervention (RTI) model is becoming more widely known among educators. In the United States, it is now incorporated into the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004). In Australia, all schools are expected to make provision for students with learning difficulties in response to the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and the Disability Standards for Education (2005) by virtue of the requirement for 'reasonable adjustment'.

The RTI model is based on the notion of 'Prevention before Intervention'. It uses a three tier model (usually represented as a pyramid) to place students according to the mode of intervention needed. Schools typically use the RTI approach to identify children early who may be behind their same age peers in the six essential skills for reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, oral language, fluency, comprehension and vocabulary. However, the approach is not limited to teaching reading, but can be used to identify and meet the needs of students in a wide variety of areas such as mathematics, written expression, social and emotional needs among others.

## Why do we need it?

The existing model for intervention has largely been based on a 'fail first then intervene' approach. Comments such as: 'He's not that far behind,' or "She just needs to work a little harder," will lead to further questioning under the RTI approach, so that teachers might ask:

"How far behind?" "What exactly does she need to work on to improve?" We need to identify students at risk as soon as possible and begin intervention to prevent a learning difficulty from developing or worsening into school failure.

Students will continue to be withdrawn for support, and this model does not replace the role of specialised teachers. In fact, schools really need to be training teachers and increasing their special education teachers to manage the RTI within the school.

Data is used from benchmark testing to determine which students require intervention. Continued monitoring at regular intervals using both benchmark and progress tests is used to measure progress and adjust the teaching intervention. Assessors may need to use tests typically used in earlier years for some students to find where their skill set is, for example, older students who have less developed phonemic and phonological awareness skills.

**Tier 1** comprises about 80% of students, including those at risk of learning difficulties. This is where a teacher delivers exemplary practice, making use of contemporary evidence based practice in key areas including phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The students stay in the classroom with targeted teacher support initially, perhaps making use of in-class assistance by the teacher or a paraprofessional (education assistant or teacher aide). These students require the minor adjustments mentioned below. However, effective classroom programs and instruction may still not be adequate for all students, and these students will require support at Tier 2.

**Tier 2** comprises 10-15 percent of students who need more than the Tier 1 interventions. This level of intervention is delivered, typically daily, to small groups of students using intensive, evidence based programs and regular progress monitoring. This intervention

is additional to, rather than instead of, effective whole class programs.

**Tier 3** comprises around 5% of students who are withdrawn 3-4 times per week

for individual, specialised intervention because they are not able to keep up with their peers in a small group context and require an individual plan.

A student can move back a level or out of intervention altogether if their progress measures indicate that benchmarks have been achieved. When students are known to a school, they might be ready to begin Tier 2 or 3 immediately without the progression through the tiers.

## How do we do it?

### Identify your champion

Someone in a school needs the passion to drive change. It could be school management or it could be a teacher.

### Identify the "What's so" or the current state of practice.

Think:

- How do we identify students requiring additional support?
- How do we deliver support?
- What resources do we have (teacher aides, parent helpers, staff)?
- Do we utilise them in the best way possible?
- What works and what needs change?

### Get management on board.

Do your homework on RTI. Prepare a presentation to management or to key stakeholders in your work place. Explain the "Where to" or "What the RTI will look like when it is in place."



## Inform parents

Some schools like to send a letter home to inform parents that they will be conducting screening tests with a brief explanation about the RTI model.

## Screen the students

Determine the screening tests to use with each year level in your school. Begin with students in their first year of schooling. Some ideas for the first year of schooling would be a foundational test like the SEAPART (Neilson, 2015), a letter-sound checklist or DIBELS (2000). The special education teacher at your school will be able to assist with other appropriate assessments, or contact your State's Education Department or relevant sector's administrative organisation.

Your school may decide to have the RTI team conduct the testing or have the classroom teachers conduct the testing. The RTI team may test every year level over a few days or allocate time for teachers to do it.

## Collate the data

An excel spreadsheet is useful for this, as it allows you to chart progress regularly. Create a category for each area tested, for example: names of 26 sounds, names of 26 letters, identifies initial sound, final sound, segments cvc words, blends cvc words, fluency etc.

## Analyse the data

Identify the students who will require intervention by sorting the results into levels of achievement in the skill to be developed. Many tests will provide norms to help determine an expected level of performance for the year level in question.

Check the student's classroom work to rule out a bad day on the day of testing, but be sure not to assume that students have skills just because they are doing well in other areas. If necessary, re-test on another day.

## Plan the support

Use the 3 Tiers of the RTI to determine the most appropriate level of support for each student.

**Tier 1:** Students may need additional in-class support for aspects of literacy learning. This student would stay in the classroom with these minor adjustments and additional support and be closely monitored at regular intervals.

**Tier 2:** Small group withdrawal or focused, additional within classroom support, usually daily. This level of support would be helpful for students who are low average in a particular area or who require targeted support

to build a skill, for example: decoding skills, spelling strategies, social skills or phonological awareness skills. Support must use evidence-based.

**Tier 3:** Below average, well below average, or failing to make good progress in a Tier 2 context. Students at this level would be likely to benefit from comprehensive assessment of areas including language, cognitive or sensory assessment. Support may include regular individual intervention for a minimum of three sessions per week in addition to Tier 1 and/or Tier 2 support, individual goal setting, and weekly monitoring.

## Support teachers

Plan together. Identify types of intervention and how to put it into practice.

## Inform parents

It is good practice to call a meeting with the parent of a child who is identified for needing intervention. Show the parent the test and explain the result. Tell the parent what you will do about it.

## Home activities

Most parents ask what they can do to help, so have some ideas that can be followed up at home that are quick and fun (game format) to revise what you are teaching their child. Communicate regularly with parent via an agreed format about their child's progress.

## Document

Keep up to date records of your program and results. The DIBELS testing has a record form on the front of the test that allows you to record the test score for the beginning, middle and end of the year. An Individual Education plan will be required for the children in Tier 3.

## Monitor and evaluate

Remember that the response to intervention approach assumes that students will respond to the intervention – and make progress. If this is not happening, the intervention is ineffective. If it is happening too slowly, the student requires an additional tier of support. The DIBELS tests are designed to be administered at the beginning, middle and end of the year to the whole year level (not just the students receiving intervention). *This will ensure that you don't miss anyone.*

Other tests should be re-administered according to the user guide. Some tests cannot be re-administered within a certain time frame. Design formative tests that allow you to see if the student has attained a skill being targeted within a designated period, such as a fortnight, four weeks, or a term.

## Move on

Students with extra learning needs have limited time within which to attain all the necessary skills for being literate, numerate or socially adept. Once a student has attained a skill or concept, move on through the skill acquisition sequence. For example, Alpha to Omega has a term by term index for introducing letter-sound patterns, suffixes. This a useful guide. Do not move too quickly though as some children need more time to consolidate their learning.

## Keep it fluid

If a student attains the goals set for them in Tier 3, move them back to Tier 2 or Tier 1. For Tier 1 students you may need to change the classroom based support, for example, set new reading goals. Take new students in throughout the year if screening tests indicate that this is necessary.

## Pay it forward

All the hard work you have done with the students will be collated and passed on to the new teacher. They will continue your wonderful work. Meet with the RTI team to plan for the following year.

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# A phonics check of another kind

Pamela Snow

There has been much debate of recent times about the proposal to introduce a Year 1 Phonics Check in Australia. I have written before (Snow 2017a) about why I think it is justified and a potentially important part of a response to the challenge of seeing more children across the bridge to reading success in the early years of school. The Phonics Check is not a “magic bullet” and any attempt by its detractors to portray this as the view of supporters is of course simplistic and a touch mischievous.

However, the purpose of this article is to provide a rubric that primary schools can use to self-assess the extent to which they are “already doing phonics”, as is sometimes the response from schools, teachers, and other interest groups, who oppose the introduction of the Phonics Check on the grounds that current classroom practices render it redundant.

Before moving into this rubric, though, I think it is important to have some shared understandings of terminology and the fact that “phonics ain’t phonics”. Simply asserting “we do phonics” or “phonics is in the mix” is not enough to ensure strong translation of scientific evidence into classroom practice. There are a number of different types of phonics instruction, and they have different levels of effectiveness for beginning readers (Wheldall, Snow & Graham, 2017).

So – assuming then that we have a shared understanding of what is meant by synthetic, analytic, embedded, and incidental phonics, let’s have a look at some questions schools can (and in many cases already do) ask themselves to assess the level of change

in teacher knowledge and practice that may be indicated in order to better align classroom practices with the recommendations of three international inquiries into the teaching of literacy. Bear in mind too, that not one of these inquiries makes any reference to so-called “Balanced Literacy” which is essentially a re-badging of business-as-usual Whole Language instruction, with some phonics “thrown in” as individual teachers see fit. In some classrooms, “Balanced Literacy” no doubt represents a quantum shift away from Whole Language instruction, while in others, it equally assuredly represents little-to-no change at all, in line with the fact that it does not have an agreed upon definition (Snow, 2017b).

Here’s my rough do-it-yourself checklist that you might find useful as a starting point for discussion in your school or region. This is not a scientifically robust tool and nor does it pretend to be – it is simply a rough guide, based on discussions I have had with many primary teachers who have sought me out in the last two years in particular, to discuss their concerns about practices in their schools.

The first nine questions concern classroom practices and the following six items focus on teacher knowledge/beliefs in your school.

## Teacher practices

**1. Does your reading instruction begin with the introduction of a small number of letter-sound correspondences, and explicitly (and gradually) teach children how to blend, segment, insert, and delete sounds in order to produce different words?**

This approach is at the heart of systematic synthetic phonics (SSP). There are different approaches to phonics instruction, but they are not equally effective for beginning readers, and SSP is most likely to see more children off to a good start, especially those children whose progress is likely to be compromised by known or unknown vulnerabilities. Interested readers

are referred to the excellent overview by A/Prof Deslea Konza, from ECU University (Konza, 2011).



I am aware that some teachers say they find beginning reading instruction in this way “boring”. I have a pretty simple response to such teachers: in the nicest possible way, this is not about your needs, it’s about the needs of young children. I have seen great examples of early years’ teachers making SSP engaging and rewarding, so this really doesn’t wash. Perhaps teachers just need to feel more comfortable and confident with the approach.

**2. Do you use decodable texts as the starting point for children starting to read, or does your school rely on predictable, or “authentic” texts?**

It is one thing for children to be introduced to the process of reading via SSP, but it is another thing altogether for that initial teaching to be associated with the use of initial decodable texts. Decodable texts are pretty much what it says on the packet: books that contain words that are easily decodable by beginning readers. Such books provide opportunities to consolidate emergent knowledge of sound-letter

**There are a number of different types of phonics instruction, and they have different levels of effectiveness for beginning readers.**

links, so that these become more automatic for the beginning reader. There are many commercially-available sets of decodable readers,

such as Fitzroy Readers, Little Learners Love Literacy, Dandelion Readers, and Pocket Rockets. If your school has made the move to SSP, well done – that’s a significant step towards ensuring that more children emerge from the first three years of school as confident and competent readers. If, however, you are juxtaposing SSP with predictable texts, it is likely that your students are receiving mixed messages about the reading process, and may, as a consequence, develop some unhelpful early habits, such as “reading” from picture cues. I have blogged previously (Snow, 2017c) about the uncritical acceptance of the importance of “authentic texts” for beginning readers. What does “authentic” even mean, and who decides which texts

### Three-cueing is a Whole Language zombie that can be found in many Australian classrooms.

will be anointed with this descriptor? These are big questions that can sit on the table for now.

#### 3. Do you employ a so-called “Three Cueing” process in which beginning readers are encouraged to “guess” unknown words they encounter while reading, with attention to the first letter and its corresponding sound used as a last resort?

Three-cueing is a Whole Language zombie that can be found in many Australian classrooms. How many? Who knows, but it comes up often enough in my discussions with classroom teachers and parents, for me to be of the view that it is alive and well. I am happy to be presented with evidence to the contrary.

I encourage you to read Alison Clarke’s terrific summary as to why it is not aligned with SSP teaching. In fact, as pointed out by Professor Mark Seidenberg in his 2016 publication, *Language at the Speed of Sight*, the Three Cueing strategy simply teaches the habits of poor readers, and why would we want to do that?

#### 4. Do you deal with sound-letter correspondences only “in context” rather than teaching these in isolation as a starting point?

As you would realise, SSP has a focus on early teaching of specific

skills, in isolation, to reduce the cognitive and linguistic load imposed on young children early on in the reading process. Any reference to teaching reading skills in isolation typically elicits protests from the Whole Language die-hards who fervently maintain that meaning making is at the heart of reading, or words to that effect. Meaning making is certainly at the heart of reading for skilled readers, but beginning readers need to familiarise themselves with the apparatus first.

#### 5. Do you introduce lists of so-called “tricky” words (sight-words) to be learnt as wholes, early on in the reading instruction process?

The ultimate aim of reading is for most, if not all words, to become “sight words” – words that are instantly, and in fact, unavoidably recognised and understood as wholes. No-one wants to engage in the laborious and unrewarding task of sounding out every word in a sentence. That would result in poor fluency, low comprehension and a generally unrewarding experience. However, that does not mean that the “fast track” to filling children’s brains with sight words is to present them with lists of words (in many cases with at least one irregularity in phoneme-grapheme correspondence from the perspective of the beginning reader), and requiring them to memorise them. By all means, introduce sight words, but do so systematically, and via discussion with children about their composition. Most sight words contain some regular features, plus one or more irregular features. These can be discussed with and explained to beginning readers, as part of the word-study process and the wonder of learning about the origins of the English language.

#### 6. Do you base your reading instruction around some version of “The Big Five” (phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency)?

It must always be stressed that effective phonics instruction, and the knowledge of the alphabetic principle that it confers, is necessary but not sufficient for beginning readers. Beginning readers also need to be developing their phonemic awareness skills, vocabulary, comprehension, and

fluency. Some authors, such as A/ Prof Deslea Konza, argue that we should upgrade the “Big Five” to the “Big Six”, to specifically include oracy (Konza, 2014). As a speech pathologist, I can’t argue with this position. Broader language skills (e.g. with respect to narrative language) contribute to, and are strengthened by, effective reading skills. Language and literacy have a symbiotic relationship, as I have described in detail in an open access paper (Snow, 2016).

#### 7. Do you focus instruction around a “Letter of the Week”?

Many students arrive at school “knowing their letters”, e.g., as evidenced by the ability to recite the alphabet and/or to sing the Alphabet Song (the one that is sung to the tune of Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star, and annoyingly for us folk outside North America, has the final letter pronounced “Zee”). Knowledge of these 26 letters is a vital starting point, but as they need to work together to represent the 44 sounds that are used in English, teaching via a letter of the week is slow and cumbersome, and sometimes confusing for beginning readers. On the subject of letters, I was reminded too, by one of my Tweeps, that letters do not “make” or “say” sounds - they represent sounds, and often work in combination to do so, e.g., in digraphs such as th, ch, and sh.

#### 8. Do teachers in your school discourage parents from helping their children “sound out” words they do not know when they are reading at home?

It should be apparent from all I have written above that this is not a recommended approach. Parents are natural teachers of their children and are accustomed to breaking complex tasks down into manageable chunks. That is exactly the approach they should be encouraged to take with respect to early reading.

Sending decodable books home with parents encourages this natural approach and has a hidden benefit for parents whose literacy levels are low\* – it makes the process of supporting their young child more enjoyable and achievable.

\*This is also helpful to parents from non English-speaking backgrounds, who may, themselves, be learning to read in English.

#### 9. Do teachers in your school tell

### students that English is a “random” language (or words to that effect)?

This is yet another piece of Whole Language excess baggage and is incorrect. As noted previously (Snow, 2017a):

*About 50% of English words do have a transparent orthography, meaning that they can be read by someone who understands letter—sound correspondences. A further 36% have only one sound that deviates (typically a vowel), 10% can be spelt correctly if morphology and etymology are understood, and a mere 4% cannot be decoded from knowledge of these principles.*

Literacy experts should not be promulgating this myth. The “irregular” aspects of English spelling create more, not less, need for explicit and systematic teaching.

### Teacher knowledge/beliefs

#### 1. Do teachers in your school have detailed and explicit\* knowledge of concepts related to early reading instruction? Concepts to consider here include, but may not be limited to:

- a. Phonological awareness
- b. Phonemic awareness
- c. Phonics
- d. Alphabetic Principle
- e. Phoneme
- f. Phonemic blending, segmentation, insertion, deletion
- g. Consonant
- h. Vowel
- i. Syllable
- j. Stressed/unstressed syllables
- k. Schwa vowel
- l. Digraph, trigraph
- m. Diphthong
- n. Stop Vs continuant consonants
- o. Short Vs long vowels
- p. Morpheme - bound and unbound
- q. Etymology

#### 2. Can teachers in your school explain the characteristics of different types of phonics instruction (as per the explainer article mentioned earlier)?

#### 3. Do teachers in your school know how many sounds (as opposed to letters) are used in the English language?

#### 4. Do teachers in your school believe that explicitly teaching decoding skills equates to a “drill and kill” approach to early reading?

#### 5. Do teachers in your school espouse so-called “Balanced Literacy” as an appropriate pedagogical approach for early reading instruction?

#### 6. Are teachers in your school aware that there was a National

### Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy in 2005, and are they familiar with the recommendations it contained about early instruction and teacher knowledge?

As mentioned above, in recent years, I've been contacted by a number of teachers who are questioning the received wisdom of their classroom practices and in particular the utility of these practices for children who may not easily make their way across the bridge to early reading success – many of whom start from behind and stay behind.

This self-audit tool might come in handy as a basis for the discussions that many such teachers find challenging to initiate in their schools.

You know who you are.

There are strong ideological forces that make it difficult for you to be courageous and lift your head above the pedagogical parapet to signal your openness to change. You are to be applauded however, for your insights and determination to do better by reflecting on, and potentially changing, your knowledge and teaching practices.

As a researcher, it's my job to do what I can to support you.

\* Explicit knowledge is knowledge that we can talk about, explaining underlying rules and principles. Implicit knowledge, on the other hand, is an understanding that something is “right” or “wrong” but without the ability to articulate a rule that has been violated. For example, when shown the sentence “The boys goed to the beach” most adults would agree that it is grammatically incorrect, but not all can articulate that it is incorrect because the past tense of “go” takes an irregular verb form “went”. This requires explicit knowledge of grammar.

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# Book Review: Making sense on treatment choices

Review by **Alison Clarke**

*Making Sense of Interventions for Children with Developmental Disorders: A Guide for Parents and Professionals.*; Bowen, C., & Snow, P. (2017), Mooloolaba: Sandpiper

**H**undreds of interventions are available for kids with communication, learning, attention, social, memory and/or behaviour difficulties. Some are also used to hot-house these skills in typical kids. Sorting effective interventions from snake oil can be tricky enough for professionals, but a minefield for parents.

Testimonials are much easier to understand than research data. Confident sweeping statements by charismatic sales-folk with magnificent

hair seem more persuasive than the usually tentative-sounding statements of scientists. The promise of a miracle cure sounds more appealing than a proposal to work hard for years building skills.

To add to the complexity, professionals who should know better sometimes promote treatments lacking good evidence, or fail to speak up when colleagues do. Respectfully challenging a colleague can be difficult.

Those promoting questionable interventions sometimes make legal or other threats when publicly challenged, which can also have a silencing effect. Silence is easily misinterpreted as agreement.

Hooray, therefore, for Caroline Bowen and Pamela Snow's important book, "[Making Sense of Interventions for Children with Developmental Disorders: A Guide for Parents and Professionals](#)". Here's a picture:

[Pam](#) and [Caroline](#) have long helped lead and inspire Australian Speech Pathologists and related professionals, and readers may be familiar with Pam's blog, [The Snow Report](#). I had put in an advance order for their book long before being asked to review it, and writing a review was always the plan, so I was pleased to agree and accept a review copy (sorry getting it actually done has taken so long, Pam!).

A major strength of this book is its understanding that both the brain and the heart are involved in decision-making about how to best help kids with special needs. Understanding and empathy are as necessary as clinical experience and research knowledge to making good decisions. Lack of understanding and empathy can help drive the market for non-evidence-based interventions.

It's never patronising or superior, but this book has many entertaining moments as it takes us on a tour of the world of infant hot-housing, made-up conditions (Gameboy Disease!), pseudoscience and neuro-flapdoodle, as well as "could try harder" interventions

and those based on solid evidence.

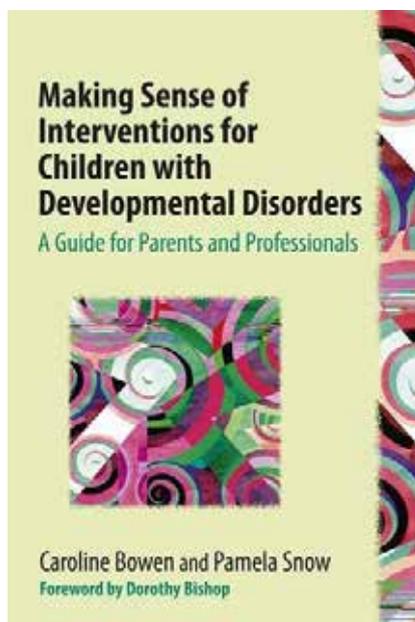
To give you an idea of the terrain the book covers, the 12 chapter titles are:

1. Goldfields and minefields
2. The baby business: accelerating typical development
3. Executive control, attention and working memory
4. Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders
5. Behaving, feeling and getting along with others
6. Augmentative and Alternative Communication: controversies, contradictions and change
7. Voice, language, speech and fluency
8. Auditory processing and learning
9. Reading
10. Diets, supplements, and nutrition: what's on the menu?
11. Parents navigating the marketplace
12. Treatment choices in everyday practice

I'll focus now on Chapter 9, as it's perhaps of most general interest, but the other chapters are organised similarly, starting with general principles and then working through key issues and common interventions.

## Example chapter: Reading

We start with the big picture: reading consists of two key skill-sets: decoding and comprehension. Decoding is how we get words off the page, so that we can use the same language comprehension skills used for listening to understand their meaning. While English sound-letter relationships are complex, there are strong patterns, and only about 4% of words are truly irregular.



Reading interventions with the best evidence systematically teach awareness of sounds in words (phonemic awareness), spelling patterns (phonics), vocabulary, comprehension and fluency. Interventions based on the (false) idea that reading is a skill that develops naturally typically lack adequate focus on phonemic awareness and phonics.

Children are often asked to visually memorise lists of high-frequency words, but this is not an efficient use of their time or mental resources. The debate surrounding the use of the term “dyslexia” is summarised and the authors conclude that struggling readers need early, effective intervention, whether they have a formal dyslexia diagnosis or not.

Both authors have worked in both health and education, so are able to compare prevailing attitudes to research findings in these sectors, concluding that “we can reasonably expect that there is an evidence-informed line of thinking behind decisions about our healthcare”, but that “a worrying degree of debate persists in education circles about the extent to which teaching should be informed by empirically-derived principles”.

They discuss the evidence available for a number of popularly-adopted programmes: Reading Recovery™, the Arrowsmith Program™, Cellfield™, Fast ForWord®, Interactive Metronome™ and Coloured Lenses™/Irlen® Syndrome™ as well as Behavioural Optometry approaches more generally. All are found to lack convincing evidence; you’ll have to read the book for the details.

Orton-Gillingham approaches like Spalding/the Writing Road to Reading and Alphabetic Phonics are described as having many features that align with the current research, particularly in linking language and literacy, using systematic synthetic phonics and teaching about word structure and derivation. However, they may over-emphasise teaching phonics rules, and “multisensory” activities used in these programs like writing letters on a roughened surface and forming letter shapes with one’s body lack good evidence. As Orton-Gillingham is actually multiple different programs, its evidence-base is thus described as equivocal.

Lindamood-Bell® programs like the ADD or LiPS® program and the Seeing Stars® program are also described as containing many sensible, evidence-based components, but again including

non-evidence-based “multisensory” activities. Some of the theoretical explanations for reading difficulties used in Lindamood-Bell programs (e.g. weak symbol imagery and/or weak concept imagery) are also unique to these programs, not derived from cognitive science research.

Warning signs that a program is probably not evidence-based include: testimonials and stories about personal experience used in marketing; “neuro/brain-based” language; symbols like ™, ® or © in the program name; and/or claims it is effective for a wide range of difficulties despite a notable lack of information about where to find research supporting these claims published in peer-reviewed, reputable journals.

Bowen and Snow say the program Toe By Toe appears to apply evidence-based principles, but again include a “multisensory” caveat. They endorse the MultiLit program and associated MiniLit, InitialLit and MacquLit programs as being based on sound, readily-accessible evidence.

In general, they advise working directly on skills that have been assessed as areas of difficulty, e.g. phonics and handwriting if decoding and spelling are the main areas of difficulty; comprehension if this is the main area in which a child is struggling. Not spinal manipulation, special diets, balancing on one leg, memorising clock faces or anything other than actual reading or spelling.

### Levels of evidence

Gold standard research is difficult and expensive to do, so it’s not surprising that there are many widely-used interventions which Bowen and Snow say “could try harder” in the research department. I draw on some of them myself – PECS, Social Stories, TEACCH and Hanen – when working with children on the Autism Spectrum. This book made me even more conscious of the need to keep checking for new evidence and better approaches, and wish it were easier for clinicians to access journals, and to incorporate research into clinical practice.

I’d never heard of many of the 170-odd (some odder than others) interventions listed on their “No Convincing Evidence” list on page 339, but what a terrifically handy reference list to have! Thank goodness nothing I use appears on it, though I have used Fast ForWord™ with children with low receptive language skills, initially when

it was being researched at our Royal Children’s Hospital, and well before it started being marketed for a vast range of difficulties.

The book points out that many things on their ‘No Convincing Evidence’ list have a firm foothold in mainstream clinical practice and education. As well as things I’d never heard of (Bleach therapy. Chirophonetics. Defeat Autism Now Diet. GemlIni. Opioid Excess Theory. Psychological Astrology. The Children of the Rainbow. WeeHands. Where do they get these names?!), and the reading interventions listed above, the list includes Auditory Integration Treatments, Balanced Literacy, Brain Gym®, Chiropractic, the Davis Dyslexia Program, Dyslexie, Facilitated Communication, Homeopathy, Irlen® lenses, Kinesiology, Learning Styles Theory, Multi-Cueing (AKA Searchlights), Multiple Intelligences, Naturopathy, Osteopathy, Psychodynamic Intervention for ASD, Rapid Prompting Method (RPM), Sensory Diets, Sensory Integration Therapy, Sensory Rooms, Supported Typing, Switch On Reading, TalkTools® for SSD, The Listening Program®, the Three-Cuing System, Whole Brain Learning, Whole Brain/Brain-Based Teaching and Whole Language.

I was a little surprised to find the Wilson Reading System® on this list (I asked Pam about this, who said it ticks a lot of theoretical boxes, but they couldn’t find actual research on it, and will review this for the next edition), and very disappointed not to find camel’s milk as a cure for Autism. I guess they had to draw the too-obviously-silly line somewhere.

This book should be made available to parents of children with developmental disorders via public libraries, as it has the potential to save them a lot of grief, time and money finding effective interventions, and avoiding ineffective ones.

It would also be a valuable addition to paediatric and allied health professional libraries, and to the libraries of schools educating children with developmental disorders, which means most schools, I suppose.

In Australia, this book is available from [Sandpiper Publications](#).

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*This review is an adaptation of a blog first published at Alison’s [selfabet](#) website.*

# Review of Professional Development Session: Teaching Morphology

**Dr Lorraine Hammond**



**R**on Yoshimoto is a veteran teacher, principal, social worker and Orton-Gillingham consultant who is based in Hawaii but travels the world sharing his expertise in literacy and numeracy instruction. In May, he found his way to Melbourne, at the request of Sarah Asome, from Bentleigh West Primary School, to share his knowledge on Morphology. I was lucky enough to secure a place on this day long course.

Ron's session began with a story about his brother that became a recurring theme: the social and emotional impact of learning difficulties are devastating and should be prevented, whenever possible, with effective instruction. The learning problems that Ron's brother experienced led to school failure and a life punctuated by incarceration. The social worker in Ron is hard to ignore, he is a staunch advocate of vulnerable young people, but his capacity to engage an audience with his self-deprecating humour and knowledge of language is equally impressive.

## English spelling relies on morphemes as much as it does phonemes...

Like many educators, I have been guilty of overlooking morphology as a building block for reading fluency, reading comprehension, and spelling. Ron addressed this early: written English is a morphophonemic system and English spelling relies on morphemes

as much as it does phonemes to produce written words and convey their meaning. Carlisle (2011) explains: morphemes are the smallest units of meaning in a language—units that can serve as freestanding words (e.g., hard) or that are “bound” to such words (e.g., -en in harden). Morphemes are combined in different ways to express particular meanings or to fill particular grammatical roles (e.g., heal, health, healthy) (p. 464).

Research has demonstrated the value of strong morphological teaching as early as first and second grade (Apel & Lawrence, 2011), where traditionally it has been the focus in middle and high school years. Ron explained that morphological awareness makes a strong contribution to beginning readers' word-level reading, reading comprehension, and spelling abilities, explaining anywhere from 4 to 15% of students' performance on measures of these literacy skills (e.g., McCutchen, Green, & Abbott, 2008; Singson, Mahoney, & Mann, 2000; Wolter, Wood, & D'zatko, 2009).

According to Ron, morphology is one last gift you can give students before secondary school because it supplements phonics instruction and provides the building blocks of vocabulary. Morphology instruction can be introduced in first year of school with the prefixes *un*, *re* and the suffixes *ing*, *ed* and *s*. From 10-12 prefixes and 6-8 suffixes you can make 30-60 words. Lower level root words (such as *read*, *jump*, *wish*) have a strong visual concrete meaning so start with these.

Ron demonstrated how to introduce morphographs to the youngest of students and provided a generic instructional sequence that can be applied to many base words. After teaching explicitly the meaning of each prefix and suffix the teacher shows students a base word *read* against which morphemes written on cards are physically placed either end of the

base word as the teacher follows this instructional sequence:

		ing
re		ed
un	read	er
mis		able
non		ful
		les

Teacher says: “able to read.”  
Student adds *able* to the base word and says *readable*.

Teacher says: “read again.”  
Students adds *re* to the base word and says *reread*.

Teacher says: “reads wrongly.”  
Students adds *mis* to the base word and says *misread*.

Teacher says: “not able to read.”  
Students adds *un* and *able* to the base word and says *unreadable*.

For Ron, as soon as children learn the meaning of common suffixes at the lower levels of language such as *ed*, *ing*, *er*, *est*, *ly*, *fly*, *able*, *less*, *ness* and *ment* they must be taught three critical spelling rules, in this order:

**Silent-e Rule:** In a word ending with a silent e, drop the e when adding a suffix that begins with a vowel (take + ing = taking)

**1-1-1 or Doubling Rule.** In a one syllable word containing one vowel and ending with one consonant, double the final consonant when adding a suffix beginning with a vowel (*stopping*, *running*)

**Y-I Rule:** in words ending with a y preceded by a consonant, change y to i when adding a suffix expect if the suffix begins with an i (carry + ed = carried, BUT carry + ing = carrying).

The strategy Ron demonstrated to teach the Doubling Rule was characteristic of his pragmatic approach to making the complex simple for students and their teachers. Students tick or cross the box for each word and suffix. If all boxes are ticked, double the ending consonant and add the suffix.

One Syllable Word	One Vowel Letter	One Ending Consonant	Suffix begins with vowel	Baseword	+	Suffix	=	New Word
✓	✓	✓	✓	pat	+	ed	=	patted
✓	X	✓	✓	sail	+	ing	=	sailing

No discussion on morpheme is possible without understanding the three main etymological layers of the English language: knowledge that many participants acknowledged was not part of their pre-service training at university.

However, Ron highlighted the relationship between different layers of language for those attending the course as he would for his students:

1. Anglo-Saxon: basis of English (26%): smaller words, non-phonetic words, unusual sounds (ck, tch, dge, ow, etc). Build words via compounding. For example: waterfall, deathbed.
2. Latin (55%): technical and longer words. Build words via adding prefixes or suffixes to roots. In Latin, the main meaning rests with the root. For example: Expedite, advocate, instructor.
3. Greek: In Greek, the combining forms are equal relative to meaning (tele=far + scope=see). Greek combining forms are seen in science, social studies and mathematical terms. For example: Atmosphere, autobiography and triangular.

### Ron demonstrated how to introduce morphographs to the youngest of students...

By the end of the day my head was spinning with the many practical ways Ron showed to teach prefixes, suffixes and base words. However, perhaps more importantly, Ron succeeded in gently pointing out to everyone in the room what they didn't know, but needed to, in order to teach morphology well. Ron is a generous presenter and many of his materials are freely available online if you take the time to search.

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Anglo-Saxon	Latin	Greek
teaching	education	pedagogy
tiny	diminutive	microscopic
madness	lunacy	mania

# Morphological Awareness: One piece of the literacy pie

## International Dyslexia Association

**M**orphological awareness is a skill that helps students read and spell. When researchers have studied different skills that contribute to student performance on reading and spelling tasks, morphological awareness ability often is one of the skills that predicts how well students will perform on those tasks (e.g., Bowers, Kirby, & Deacon, 2010; Goodwin & Ahn, 2013). It is a skill that helps students problem-solve words they do not know how to read and spell. For reading, this is especially important when students are reading textbooks with academic language so that they can gain the knowledge they need in the subject areas they study.

### What is Morphological Awareness?

Morphological awareness is explicitly thinking about the smallest units of meaning in language, which are called morphemes. These units include root words that can stand alone as words, prefixes, suffixes, and bound roots, which are roots that must have a prefix or suffix added to become a word.

Root words	cat, jump, three, press
Prefixes	un, re, mis, pro, sub
Suffixes	ing, ed, ly, ment, ful
Bound roots	ject, rupt, mit, pute

### Why do parents and teachers need to know about Morphological Awareness?

Morphological awareness is important because we use morphemes to convey meaning when we talk or write to listeners or readers. Often when we read or write, we need to think about the morphemes in words. For example, for a young student, it may be confusing to remember how to spell the past tense suffix in a word such as jumped, because the last sound in that word sounds like a /t/ sound. However, if the student thinks about what the word means (past tense) and the student knows that ed is the suffix most often used to change a word to past tense, she will know how to spell the suffix in jumped correctly. In this case, she is using morphological awareness to help her spell the word. The same can be true when reading. The same student may come across a word she has never seen before in a book – for example, refriended. If she knows the meaning of the prefix re- (again, back), the meaning of the root word friend, and the meaning of the suffix –ed (past tense), she can put those meanings together to get an idea of the whole word’s meaning (became a friend again).

Another reason morphological awareness is important is because it helps students identify and understand difficult academic vocabulary. In textbooks, a good portion of the vocabulary words tend to be unfamiliar words composed of multiple morphemes (that is, root words plus one or more suffixes or prefixes). Some have estimated that for every one simple word in a text, there are four multiple-morpheme words. Thus, if a student has strong morphological awareness skills, he can problem-solve what these words might mean by thinking about each of the individual morphemes, then “blending” those meanings together to

determine the word’s meaning (e.g., Anglin, 1993; Kruk & Bergman, 2013; Pacheco & Goodwin, 2013).

### How early can teachers and parents provide instruction in Morphological Awareness?

Researchers have discovered that children as young as five demonstrate some implicit morphological awareness. For example, children in kindergarten are able to correctly complete sentences such as, “This is a wug. Now there is another one. There are two of them. There are two \_\_\_\_\_”. (Berko, 1958). In first grade (approximately 6 years of age), students also differentiate their spelling of final consonant clusters (two consonants together, such as -st), depending on whether the word is a one morpheme word (spelling bind as bid) versus a two morpheme word (spelling ‘rained’ as rand), suggesting some level of morphological awareness (Bourassa, Treiman, & Kessler, 2006; Wolter, Wood, & D’zatko, 2009). Students continue to grow and develop in their morphological awareness throughout the elementary school years (e.g., Apel, Diehm, & Apel, 2013; Berko, 1958; Berninger, Abbot, Nagy, & Carlisle, 2010; Carlisle, 2004; Ku & Anderson, 2003).

Because morphological awareness begins early in childhood, educators can integrate morphological awareness activities into their curricula starting in the primary grades. They also can be prepared to assess morphological awareness in students who seem to be struggling with early reading and spelling to determine whether this particular skill is hindering literacy development. At this time, however, there is no specific formal test (standardized test – comparing the student’s performance to his/her age or grade level peers) of morphological awareness. Parents can play morphological awareness games with their children (see later in this Fact Sheet) to stimulate early

morphological awareness development in their children.

### How can educators integrate Morphological Awareness into Structured Literacy Instruction?

Educators can easily integrate morphological awareness activities into their reading and spelling curricula. For example, some educators already conduct ‘word sorts’ with their students. Word sorts are activities in which students sort individual words into separate columns based on particular commonalities and thereby “discover” a particular pattern or rule. This activity can easily be used to help students discover morphological rules (see Box 1 for an example of a word sort for discovering the rule for plurals). Once the rule has been verbalized, the educator can encourage students to employ the rule by either searching for words in their text that follow the rule and/or spelling words that follow the rule.

### Educators can easily integrate morphological awareness activities into their reading and spelling curricula.

Another activity that helps students think about root words, prefixes, and suffixes is a “word building” activity. In this activity, students are provided lists containing a number of prefixes, root

words, and suffixes. They are asked to choose one prefix, one root, and one suffix (e.g., re- cycle, -er). The students first must define what each of those three morphemes mean (if need be, the educator can help define the three morphemes). The students then blend the prefix, root word, and suffix together to create a word (‘recycler’) and define the word. The educator and the students can discuss how the word meaning captures the meanings from the individual morphemes, the spelling of the morphemes, and whether changes (i.e., spelling changes or pronunciation changes) occur when the suffixes or prefixes are attached to the root word, etc. This activity, then causes the students to explicitly think and talk about morphemes: root words, prefixes, and suffixes.

There are many other activities educators can use for helping students use their morphological awareness skills. Besides published studies of interventions that describe tasks used to teach morphological awareness (e.g., Apel & Diehm, 2014), online resources include suggestions from the University of Michigan and Language Supports.

### What can parents do at home to facilitate Morphological Awareness?

Given children show some implicit morphological awareness abilities even before they enter first grade, parents can facilitate their children’s morphological awareness skills at home through

natural play activities. For example, when playing with their child and the child’s toys, parents can occasionally draw some attention to morphemes that add additional meaning to words that represent the child’s toys. “I have one car, but you have two cars. Cars. I hear the /z/ sound at the end of cars. This tells me there is more than one car.”

Another example involves talking about a specific prefix or suffix, its meaning, and then “playing” with that prefix or suffix by adding it to words that make up real (or nonsense) words. Consider this interchange between a parent and her child:

**Parent:** “That is the tallest man I’ve seen in a long time. Hmm, I added -est to tall. Tall...est. ‘est’ means the most. That man is the most tall. I said it another way... He is the tallest. If I wanted to say your bedroom was the most clean I’ve seen, I could say it another way... the cleanest! Cleanest means most clean. Let’s think of another way to say most kind. What do you think is another way to say, most kind?”

**Child:** “Kindest?”

**Parent:** Yes! Kindest is another way to say, most kind. What about this? What’s another way to say hardest?”

**Child:** “Most hard.”

**Parent:** “Yes! Most hard is another way to say hardest.”

Morphological awareness is an important skill that influences and supports reading and spelling. Parents can draw their children’s attention to morphemes during everyday activities and conversations. Educators should integrate morphological awareness activities as part of a multi-linguistic structured literacy approach to teaching students reading and spelling. As students become more morphologically aware, they will be able to apply this awareness to their reading and spelling of more complex, multi-morphemic words, leading to better comprehension of what they read and more breadth in the language they use in their writing.

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#### Box 1. Word sort for Discovering Rule for Spelling Plurals

1. Student is provided set of cards/words and asked to sort them into two columns: *rocks, beaches, porches, apples, boxes, trucks, bears, stores, dogs*
2. Student sorts words into the following two columns:

<i>rocks</i>	<i>beaches</i>
<i>apples</i>	<i>porches</i>
<i>trucks</i>	<i>boxes</i>
<i>bears</i>	
<i>dogs</i>	
<i>stores</i>	

3. Student is asked why the words were sorted into the two columns: “The words on the left – they have only an ‘s’ – it says /s/ or /z/. It means more than one. The words on the right – they mean more than one, too, but they added an ‘es.’ I think we add ‘es’ when we hear that extra /us/ at the end of the word.”
4. Educator: “Yes, you have discovered the rule. We add an ‘s’ to words to show more than one. But if the word has an “extra beat” or syllable at the end, or like you said, the /us/, to signal more than one, we add ‘es.’ Great detective work!” Now, let’s look for words in your book that follow that rule.

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- The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) thanks Kenn Apel, Ph.D., and Sandi Soper for their assistance in the preparation of this fact sheet.*

# Review of literacy resource: The Huntsman's Lodge literacy series

Jan Roberts

The Huntsman's Lodge literacy resources, designed for reluctant readers in particular, can be used by a wide range of learners, including students in grades 3 to 10; adults needing assistance; and those groups who are learning English as an additional language or dialect. Feedback from teachers, tutors and students suggests very positive support for the resources.

Jean Bolton, then a Language Support Teacher specialising in literacy and linguistics, wrote the first story *The Monster of Huntsman's Lodge* with her author husband in an attempt to raise enthusiasm and skills among reluctant readers, to help them cope with secondary school. Encouraged by the success of the publication, Jean and her husband went on to write a total of five stories, the first three of them now having accompanying Activity Books.

Additional resources were subsequently added, to include a Literacy & Language Kit, consisting of two Activity Books based entirely on the story, an engaging CD reading of *The Monster of Huntsman's Lodge*, seven grammar games, and one syllable game.

## The Story Books

The five stories are based on the adventures of huntsman spiders in a tropical setting, presented as cartoon characters. Fun and narrative tension is created by the efforts of rival groups of spiders who covet Huntsman's Lodge. The tough Dunny Gang live in a dismal outdoor toilet and are repeatedly outwitted by the resident family of

comical characters. The A4 books, well-crafted, humorous stories written in large font, are illustrated in full-colour.

Teachers have described the stories as engaging, quirky and entertaining for all, including students with dyslexia. The challenging vocabulary extends word knowledge. Boys, especially, love the Dunny Gang because they are 'bad'. And younger students love the characters, in particular the twins.

## The Literacy & Language Kits

Each Kit has a story with accompanying Activity Book/s printed in black and white and having many illustrations that connect with the related story. The tasks are motivating and clear instructions are given. Essential skills are explicitly presented with many examples and practice.

The first L & L kit, *The Monster of Huntsman's Lodge* supports the Grade 5 NAPLAN English content.

1. Language conventions: spelling, grammar and punctuation. In addition to content within the Activity Books, grammar is significantly extended if students play the seven grammar games. Notes, clarifying definitions and examples of usage are provided. A syllable game completes the set and supports the priority given to word-study in the L & L Kit. Blends, digraphs, syllabification, alphabetical order, compound words are all included in the activities.
2. Writing. A variety of text types promote writing skills-development. They include character study; completing a conversation; creating an alibi; interview; letter to a friend; narrative writing; positive and negative concepts; writing a play /radio reading and writing associated with the science content.
3. Reading comprehension. Each chapter is analysed for meaning,

but other fiction and non-fiction passages are included with their associated activities to deepen comprehension. The science component provides information about spiders and presents a biological comparison with insects.



The Activity Books accompanying *The Infiltrator* and *Mischief* stories reinforce learning from the first Kit and the recognition of phonemes and strengthening of phonemic awareness is given particular attention. Other elements include poetry, fables, myths, legends, morphemes, synonyms and antonyms, grammar and vocabulary

Feedback from teachers affirms the value of the diverse activities and games and predictability of text; in that literacy results improved markedly, particularly in grammar, punctuation and vocabulary and the writing tasks are most appropriate and encouraging for reluctant learners. The science component adds an extra dimension to the interest level for grades 3 and 4 advanced learners.

**The Huntsman Series** is highly recommended as an additional literacy resource that would appeal to a wide range of learners, particularly those with a learning challenge at a primary level of reading.

For purchasing details, contact Jean Bolton, email: [jeanbltn@gmail.com](mailto:jeanbltn@gmail.com); 07 4935 4165

Jan Roberts, Learning Pathways.

Jan Roberts is LDA's outgoing convenor of the consultants' committee and a former LDA president.

# Specialist Teacher Consultants

## Ann Ryan, Convenor, LDA Consultant Committee

Christmas is upon us and we stop to draw breath on another busy and challenging year. Personally, I find myself trying to fill the very big footprint left by our previous Consultant Committee Convenor, Jan Roberts. While I have always admired Jan's knowledge of and commitment to LDA, I was quite unaware of the extent of her work until taking on this role. Now I am very grateful for Jan's guidance as I work towards supporting Specialist Teacher Consultants.

These past weeks I have turned my attention to thinking about what we do as LDA Specialist Teacher Consultants. And what a vibrant, skilled and knowledgeable group we are! Traditionally, consultants have been referred to as 'Consultant Tutors' to reflect the work of engaging, one-on-one with students with additional learning needs. However, the term 'tutor' has done little to reflect the broader role we play in conducting educational assessments, developing individual programs, teaching explicit and systematic programs, providing intervention consultancy for schools, guiding parents and promoting LDA principles within communities. LDA Consultants are agents of change. Through their work, they apply, model and promote effective evidence-based, best practice teaching.

This is not new. I have taken snippets from Jo Jenkinson's "A history of Learning Difficulties Australia", *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*, Volume 11, No 1, 2006 to Volume 12, No 1, 2007, referring to the responsibilities of the Consultants' role

in 1979:

- formal qualifications in teaching (currently 3 years minimum teacher)
- certification in diagnosis (currently post graduate studies)
- personal characteristics, including "a genuine interest in children and individuals, patience, sympathy and a sense of humour", flexibility and creativity, good communication skills, and stamina.
- expected to be able to conduct "preliminary diagnostic testing"
- to be responsible for referring a child to an educational psychologist "indicating the kinds of tests he feels would be useful to the child and the teacher concerned"
- to plan and conduct an individual program which would be taught in intensive sessions on a one-to-one basis
- to make others directly concerned with the child's education aware of the child's learning difficulties and their practical implications
- to keep abreast with research and practical ideas

The school, in turn, was expected to provide a well-equipped resource room, to give remedial teachers full responsibility for their work, and to ensure the cooperation and understanding of all those within the school framework.

The language has changed, but the role of consultants remains very much aligned to the original aims of the organisation. We continue to perform diagnostic assessments and develop targeted programs in response, delivering these both in homes, in private practice offices and in schools – as has been happening since 1965. However, major and important changes in neuroscience, including neuroimaging, have deepened our commitment to explicit and systematic pedagogical practices.

While the focus of intervention has moved from remediation (which implies something needs fixing) to explicit teaching on a developmental continuum (suggestive of targeted knowledge and

skill gaps), the emphasis on diagnostic assessment remains the cornerstone of our program delivery. And importantly, this is one aspect of LDA Consultant

practice that allows us to contribute effectively to support the needs of struggling learners.

It can be very difficult for teaching staff to conduct individual diagnostic assessments – the demands of busy classrooms can be a preventative factor, but more commonly, teachers do not have the specialised knowledge or understandings. Yet while it is expected that all mainstream classroom teachers will have the skills to meet the needs of every student, we know this is only achievable with a deep knowledge of the particular learning needs of the struggling individual student. The intervention must be specific and meet the need. Many schools do not employ qualified special education staff or learning enhancement staff, who are



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best placed to support teachers by conducting diagnostic assessments and/or translating outcomes to learning plans. This is very notable in regional communities, where smaller schools simply do not have the student population or the funds to provide such specialised staff. Other larger schools often direct funding to different priorities. Yet struggling learners populate all schools and the teaching/learning demands of meeting these student needs is often well beyond what can be realistically provided by classroom teachers. With the growing practice of response-to-intervention (RTI) programs, grounded in quality explicit instruction at Tier 1, this situation may ease.

However, in the meantime, all can benefit by accessing the services of LDA Specialist Teacher Consultants. Many consultants currently deliver sessions in schools, teaching in withdrawal one on one situations. There are obvious benefits for the students: school hours are often seen as the accepted 'learning hours'; there are opportunities for teacher/consultant liaisons to maximise progress for the student; learning programs can be more easily monitored collaboratively; and effective methodologies can be modelled.

### Many schools have benefited by inviting LDA Specialist Teacher Consultants to speak at staff meetings and deliver workshops...

Equally, there are many benefits at a school level. Specialist Teacher Consultants can share knowledge of learning difficulties, how to identify these, and how to implement effective programs. These recommendations will often extend what happens in the classroom so that more intensive, repetitive and explicit teaching can be applied to meet the needs of struggling students. At times, a very different program and or methodology to that currently being implemented in classrooms may be recommended. Many schools have benefited by inviting LDA Specialist Teacher Consultants to speak at staff meetings and to deliver workshops in areas such as explicit phonics, resistant writers, core maths skills etc. It is very common for teachers to ask 'What is dysgraphia? What is dyscalculia? How can I help this student?'

Parents often request that LDA Consultants hold weekly sessions with students at school. This facilitates frequent, open and collaborative communication between themselves, teachers, and the consultant. Where Program Support Group teams form to ensure appropriate educational planning for a student, both parents and teachers appreciate the expertise offered by an LDA Consultant. The opportunity to have an independent and authoritative advocate for the child is valued.

More commonly, consultants work individually with students in out-of-school sessions. While there are also obvious benefits of working this way, including opportunities to model teaching strategies to interested parents, there are equally many ways to collaborate with schools and raise awareness of the needs of struggling learners. Individual consultant practitioners will be happy to explain the types of services they offer.

And lastly, but of great importance, there is a clause in the National Disability Standards in Education (2015) of which we all need to be mindful. It states that education providers are required to... *provide necessary specialised support services for students to participate in activities, either directly in the organisation, or by outsourcing to another person or agency.* LDA Specialised Teacher Consultants can play a valuable role in assisting principals to meet this requirement.

Currently there are 81 LDA Specialist Teacher Consultant members registered across Australia. We encourage new membership – please go to the LDA website [www.ldaustralia.org](http://www.ldaustralia.org) and follow the consultant link. Further, consultants can be found by following the Online Tutor Search (OTS) link on the website. Should you need the services of a Specialist Teacher Consultant, and cannot find one in your area through the OTS, email [ldaquery@bigpond.net.au](mailto:ldaquery@bigpond.net.au)

For details about the process and requirements for becoming an LDA Specialist Teacher Consultant, please refer to the website [www.ldaustralia.org](http://www.ldaustralia.org)