

Kevin Wheldall



## How hard is it not to read?

Every morning I stand in front of the bathroom mirror waiting for my electric toothbrush to tell me when the required two minutes of brushing is complete. Rather than looking at myself (not a pretty sight first thing in the morning), my eyes wander across the bathroom shelf. I am assailed by items on the shelf or, rather, by the words on the items. ‘Shampoo’ leaps out at me, rapidly followed by silent shouts of ‘deodorant’, ‘toothpaste’ and, worst of all, ‘man size tissues’. Seriously, who wants to be called ‘large ‘n’ thick’ first thing in the morning ... ?

No, I’m not having a psychotic incident. Trapped in front of the washbasin, it just seems impossible not to read the words on the products directly in front of one. A colleague tells me that she has the same problem with the cereal packet at breakfast. She can’t stop herself reading the words on the box. I found this enormously reassuring. I’m referring here to the simple fact that when you can read well, you can’t not read. We cannot inhibit our learned skill of reading, apparently instantaneously, any string of letters forming a word in our focus. When you think about it, this really is a remarkable facility to possess.

We have scientific proof of this by virtue of the Stroop test. Participants in research studies are successively presented with words of different colours and are asked to name the colour as quickly as possible. The time taken to do this is recorded and is known as the reaction time. If the word, say, blue is presented in the colour blue, the reaction time for naming the colour is faster than when, say, the word red is presented in blue. It appears that our facility for instantly reading words, in this case the names of colours, inhibits our response to colour naming and hence increases our reaction times. All of this emphasises the importance of automaticity. It is not enough to teach kids to decode accurately. We must also teach them to decode fluently; to reach automaticity.

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Robyn Wheldall



## Stay safe

It would seem odd to send this issue of *Nomanis* out into the world without making reference to COVID-19. What a rare thing it is that the whole world is so keenly focused on precisely the same thing at the same time. There are many issues about which we should all be concerned that threaten our existence and our wellbeing. But we are probably living through a distinct period of history where we are collectively cognisant of facing a common threat and enemy at the same time.

What is it that we shall learn through this experience? There will be many lessons but one I wish to focus on here is the importance of connectedness. The first easing of restrictions in the state where I live is allowing two people (with children if they have them) to go into another home where their friends or relatives are, just to be in each other’s presence. Even though physical or social distancing must still be observed, the mere fact of being able to be in the physical presence of those who are important to us was seen as a critical first step in easing the feelings of isolation that have been mounting and concomitant decline in people’s mental health. We are built for interaction. We are built for connection. We have marvellous means of keeping in touch with each other in this technological era. But even though we’ve Zoomed, Face-timed, Hung out and WhatsApped to our hearts’ content, we still crave that most human of things. I think this is a very good reminder to us all that ‘No Man Is An Island’, the John Donne poem that inspired the title of this *Nomanis* publication and that Connecting, one of the purposes of *Nomanis*, is more crucial than ever. We wish for you and yours a safe journey out of this mire, and for those of you who have lost friends and loved ones we hope that your grief will be eased by knowing that others care.

Robyn Wheldall,  
Joint Editor



p.s. Keep physical distancing socially. The agisted sheep at our country place (where we are currently isolated) have learned this already!