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Bulletin

Special Issue: Learning Struggles and Resilience

From the President

Lorraine Hammond

I recently had the opportunity to travel to the regional school in Western Australia where I began my career as a secondary English teacher in the 1990s. I didn't last long teaching the classics. One term in, I realised that my students, who ranged in age from 13 to 16 and were all in one class, did not have the reading skills to meet their needs. One term later I stopped trying to 'love them to literacy' and turned to *Corrective Reading*, a scripted Direct Instruction program recommended to me by a colleague but denounced by my university lecturers. A drought conspired against me and when numbers dropped, I moved to a neighbouring school where I met more of the same adolescents with the same reading difficulties.

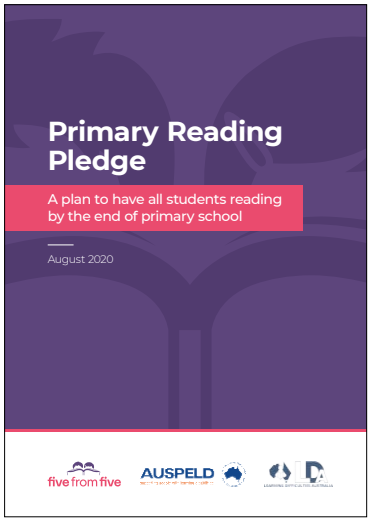
As someone who has taught adolescents to read, I can attest to the importance of early intervention. The social, emotional and economic costs of poor literacy my students experienced left a lasting impression on me, and since then I have spent most of my life teaching pre-service and in-service teachers about evidence-based reading instruction to prevent instructional casualties and to best support those students with enduring learning disabilities.

When Dr Jennifer Buckingham invited LDA and AUSPELD to collaborate on *The Primary Reading Pledge*, we embraced the opportunity for LDA to influence primary school teachers and administrators in their choice of systematic, synthetic reading programs.

It is not that Australian teachers don't teach phonics. In fact it is common practice in schools these days. But it may well be the choice of program and whether the phonics instruction is systematic, structured, and synthetic, and also whether it is implemented with fidelity, that could be behind the high number of students entering high schools with poor reading skills.

The *Primary Reading Pledge* is a campaign to call on all Australian State and Territory Ministers to implement a systemic intervention plan to substantially reduce the number of children who leave primary school unable to read. The proposal calls on them to provide diagnostic assessment and appropriate evidence-based intervention to all children who do not achieve benchmarks in the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check (where applicable), and the Year 3 and Year 5 NAPLAN assessments.

Primary Reading Pledge: To reduce to near zero the number of children who finish primary school unable to read by providing primary schools with the resources and training to provide effective assessment and intervention.



If you have not signed the *Primary Reading Pledge*, I encourage you to do so. *https://fivefromfive.com.au/support_primary_reading_pledge*

LDA's President, Dr Lorraine Hammond AM, is an Associate Professor at the School of Education at Edith Cowan University. Lorraine divides her time between research projects on high impact instruction, teaching pre and inservice teachers, supervising higher degree students and writing and delivering professional learning for The Kimberley Schools Project. Lorraine is the Chair, Deputy Chair and Board Member of three high performing schools in WA. Lorraine has been a member of LDA Council since 2010 and has previously served as President and Vice-President

LDA Professional development: Tune in so that you don't tune out

Michael Roberts, General Manager of LDA

One of the reasons prospective members join LDA is to access first-class professional development. The availability of professional development has been badly affected by the pandemic, and one of the major adjustments in our new world has been the increased adoption of technology to replace face-to-face meetings. For LDA, our regular professional development sessions and visiting overseas speakers have been temporarily put on hold. To partially fill the void that this has left, we have started conducting Weekly Wednesday Webinars.

These presentations are generally 30-40 minutes long and are broadcast over Zoom at 6pm (Eastern Australian time) on a Wednesday night. The sessions are free and cover a variety of topics. All sessions have been highly informative. We have had a number of LDA members presenting, including Lyn Stone, Alison Clarke, Sarah Asome, Steven Capp and David Morkunas. Our presenters have also included the well-known American reporter Emily Hanford, who has produced a number of influential documentaries on the topic of how reading is taught in schools, and Jennifer Buckingham, a well-respected Australian advocate of effective teaching of reading and founder of the Five from Five website. As can be seen in the WWW schedule for May to December 2020 on page 24, later this year we are keenly anticipating webinars from experts such as Pam Snow and Louisa Moats.

If anyone misses a session, most sessions are recorded (with the permission of the presenter) and uploaded to our Learning Difficulties Australia YouTube Channel. It has been heartening to watch as our webinar subscriber numbers have steadily grown, with over 500 now subscribed. The webinar on Response to Intervention presented by our Council member and Secretary, Sarah Asome, has had over 3,600 views so far!

If you have not tuned in, please do so – and please help to spread the word to others.

On another professional development matter: Council resolved this year to proceed with a National Conference in January 2021, and it was hoped that this would become an annual event. Recent developments and the uncertainty surrounding travel means that this has already been re-thought. It is likely that, instead, LDA will attempt a virtual national conference with state-based local face-to-face practical sessions early next year. Planning is continuing apace.

Finally, I would love to hear your thoughts on anything related to LDA and education in general. Ideas, opinions, and suggestions both positive and negative are most welcome, so that we can continue to improve our offerings!

My email is *general.manager@ldaustralia.org*.

Best wishes,
Michael

Michael Roberts has been working as the General Manager of LDA since January 2020, having had previous experience as a school principal, executive director and Gonski panellist. Michael has successfully implemented and advocated for both explicit and direct instruction through his school and non-school roles as well as through his private business, COGlearn.

Council news

LDA has continued to adapt during the COVID 19 pandemic, finding new ways to support our members as well as continuing to work on issues raised by the 2019 LDA Sustainability Review.

There have been a number of changes on Council since the last meeting on Council of 14 July, with four resignations from Council, four new members filling the casual vacancies, and three changes in Council Positions.

Ann Ryan resigned as Secretary of LDA and Convenor of the Consultants Committee after the LDA Council meeting on 14 July. Jo Whithear, the Convenor of the Website Committee, had submitted her resignation in the week before the Council meeting, and resignations from our other two Consultant members on Council, Lyn Franklin and Juanita Lee, followed immediately after this meeting. LDA offers sincere thanks to our departing Council members, Ann Ryan, Jo Whithear, Lyn Franklin and Juanita Lee, for the very strong contributions they have made to LDA over the years. We recognise that this has been a difficult time for many of our members, and particularly for our Consultant members, who have had to adjust their practices to meet the demands of remote learning and to develop the new skills required to deliver effective online learning. Specific words of thanks to the outgoing Council members follow later in the Council News.

The four new members on Council are Alison Clarke, Jo Hirst, Olivia Connelly and David Morkunas. Words of welcome to them follow later in the Council News, along with recognition of those Council members who are filling new positions on Council.

Our Membership

Membership of LDA currently stands at 522, with 370 standard members, 64 consultant members, 50 institutional members and 29 student members, as well as 9 life members. This number is down 58 members since June 2019. Reasons for the decrease in numbers over the past year are unclear, but could be related to the lack of any face-to-face LDA professional learning over this period, which works against new members signing up, and also to problems that LDA is continuing to experience with the online payment and renewal system, which has been making it difficult for some existing members to renew their LDA membership online. Members who think that their LDA membership may have lapsed over the past year may like to check their current membership status with Duke Babovic, LDA Administration Officer, by email at *enquiries@ldaustralia.org*.

Staff

In the last issue of the Bulletin we welcomed Ian Munro to the part time short term contract position of Data Manager to assist with the management of our online membership application and renewal system and to link the information on payments to our membership data, pending the establishment of a new upgraded membership database. He has done a great job in sorting out the problems we have been experiencing with our online membership renewal system and keeping track of our new members. He has now been joined by Duke Babovic, our new LDA Administration Officer, who will be providing administrative support to LDA's various activities and will be a point of contact for our members for queries and enquiries.

LDA Awards

LDA is delighted to announce that two annual LDA awards will be presented at the upcoming AGM in November 2020. The recipient of the Mona Tobias Award is Bartek Rajowski, a speech-language pathologist who is the creator of the ReadingDoctor Software, a suite of scientifically based, interactive apps designed to improve literacy skills in children. The recipient of the Rosemary Carter Award is Kirstin Anthian, a longstanding Consultant member of LDA who has made significant contributions to the support of students with Learning Difficulties and Auditory Processing Difficulties, both through direct teaching and through consultancy roles with the Save the Children Fund and with Gateways Support Services as part of a multidisciplinary allied health team.

Further information regarding the presentation of the awards at the LDA AGM will be provided to members of LDA prior to the event.

Professional Development

The LDA Wednesday Weekly Webinar (WWW) series, initiated in May as a means of providing professional development for our members during the COVID 19 pandemic, has proved very popular, as documented in the Report from the General Manager in this Bulletin.

LDA is planning to hold a National Conference in January, which will comprise both a 'virtual conference' with international speakers presenting keynote addresses via Zoom, together with state-based workshop sessions with local presenters. The theme of the Conference will be *Theory and practice - Effective teaching practices based on scientific research*, and the proposed date is 14th to 15th of January. Further information about this Conference will be provided to our members as plans progress.

New LDA Website and Membership Database

Work continues on the development of a new website and membership database which we hope will streamline procedures, leading to improved services to our members and also the capacity to handle an expansion of membership numbers. LDA appreciates the contribution of all Council members who have contributed to the task of updating the content and format of the current website in preparation for the transition to a new website. This is a big job, so if any of our members have an interest in contributing to this task, we would welcome your support. We also welcome comments and suggestions about ways in which the website might

be improved and made more user friendly in terms of navigation and location of relevant information. Comments and suggestions can be emailed to LDA at *enquiries@ldaustralia.org*

LDA Constitutional Issues

LDA is considering the possibility of making a change to its legal structure, and we are currently seeking legal advice about the best way to proceed. Members of LDA will be kept informed of progress on this issue.

AGM

The LDA AGM was originally scheduled to be held on Saturday 17 October, but has now had to be deferred to Saturday 14 November, and will be held as a 'virtual' meeting via Zoom. Further details of the arrangements for the AGM will be provided to members of LDA as they become available.

Call for Nominations for the LDA 2020/2021 Council

A call for nominations for positions on the LDA 2020/2021 Council will have been received by members by the time they receive this Bulletin, providing full details of the nomination process. All positions on Council will be open for nomination, and nominations are required to be received 30 days before the date of the AGM.

Thanks to Outgoing Council Members

LDA wishes to express sincere thanks to four LDA members who have recently resigned from LDA council.

Jo Whithear was a Council member from October 2013 to October 2019, and served as Secretary of LDA from March to September 2018. She was Convenor of the Website Committee from October 2019, and contributed to LDA's website and social media activities over her period as a member of LDA Council. During this time Jo was also President of the ACT SPELD Chapter and Vice President of the national organisation AUSPELD. As Director of the Canberra Reading Clinic Jo assisted LDA with her business experience and knowledge of the not-for-profit sector. Her contributions have been much appreciated.

Three of the retiring members, Ann Ryan, Lyn Franklin and Juanita Franklin, are also LDA Consultants, and the following acknowledgement of their work with LDA has been contributed by Olivia Connelly, the incoming Convenor of the LDA Consultants Committee, on behalf of LDA Council.

Ann Ryan joined LDA in February 2007. Living in Wangaratta, she has been in contact with many of our regional members in this part of Victoria. She became a member of LDA Council in October 2016 and LDA Secretary in October last year. Over the years Ann has shown a strong commitment to LDA, particularly since taking on the role of Convenor of the Consultants Committee in 2017. The transition from the manual handling of applications for Consultant membership and renewals of Consultant membership to a greater reliance on online processing of documents has been a difficult period for Consultants over the last few years, and Ann has spent a considerable amount of time and effort in trying to resolve problems and to get this system running smoothly. Consultant members of LDA are very appreciative of her contribution to the LDA Consultant member group. We wish her well in her new-found freedom, but hope that she will continue to offer her advice and support to Consultant members as an active member of our group.

Juanita Lee has stepped down from LDA Council but will thankfully be continuing on the Consultants Committee. As Convenor of the Consultants committee, I am looking forward to the continuation of her practical and measured advice in our regular meetings, as well as her exceptional organizational skills, which were on display at our last face to face Consultants Assessment PD in February. Juanita's co-ordination skills were magnificent. I am not sure how she managed to synchronise so many speakers and so many presentations, but she did it all with calm and composure. Thank you, Juanita for your service on Council.

I was saddened by **Lyn Franklin**'s decision to step down from both Council and the Consultants Committee. Lyn and I have been friends for many years and in addition to her excellent sense of humour, I have always found her to be a highly professional and incredibly knowledgeable practitioner. She is an insightful and adept presenter as evidenced by her significant contribution to our professional development day on assessment, where she provided an overview of her school's assessment procedures. She showed how schools can track student learning growth with remarkable outcomes at surprisingly low cost. I will miss her concise and constructive involvement in our meetings, but I know I will also lean on her and Juanita's deep experience gained from her service on LDA Council as I attempt to get up to speed on all matters LDA!

Thanks, Ann, Juanita and Lyn from Olivia Connelly and LDA Council.

Welcome to new Council Members

LDA welcomes four new members of Council, and keenly anticipates the contributions that they will be able to bring to the Association.

When **Olivia Connelly** was appointed to fill one of the casual vacancies on Council, she also took on the role of Convenor of the Consultants Committee. Olivia became a Consultant member of LDA in 2007 and has been a long-standing member of the LDA Consultants Committee. She was a member of Council in 2010 to 2011. Olivia is the Director of Gameplan Education, founded in 2009, a language, literacy, learning and advocacy consultancy that provides assessment and intervention services to students with additional needs across all levels of the curriculum, and employs a staff of eleven, including special educators and speech pathologists.

Alison Clarke has re-joined Council to fill one of the casual vacancies on Council. She was a member of LDA Council from 2013 to 2016 and served as Vice-President in 2015 to 2016. She was active in organising the Melbourne visits of both Maryanne Wolf in 2016 and David Kilpatrick in 2019. Alison is a speech language pathologist and has a private practice in North Fitzroy, employing seven staff, mostly part timers. She established her Spelfabet website in 2012. This website has become well known as a source of information about evidence-based literacy teaching and interventions, and will be well known to members of LDA. Alison was the recipient of the 2018 LDA Mona Tobias Award.

David Morkunas, appointed to fill one of the four casual vacancies in Council, is a new member of LDA, having joined LDA in July this year. He has been a teacher at Bentleigh West Primary School for the past four years, and has been involved in the development of their evidence-based teaching program, and a senior member the school's Review Team, which is responsible for designing review lessons

which adhere to cognitive load theory and the school's broader pedagogical model. David has spoken at a number of recent Conferences and teacher events, including the 2019 AUSPELD Language, Learning and Literacy Conference in Perth, the ResearchED Conference in Melbourne (2019), the Sharing Best Practice event in Melbourne (held at Bentleigh West Primary School in 2019) and at INVESTEd in Inverloch (in February 2020). He presented a webinar in the LDA WWW series on retrieval practice, and will also be presenting at the LDA National Conference in January next year.

Jo Hirst, also appointed to fill one of the four casual vacancies on Council, and also a new member of LDA, is a Learning Support Teacher at St Peter's Woodlands Grammar School in Adelaide. In this role she has spent time upskilling teachers and education support officers in the Science of Reading, developing curricula, and setting up and implementing evidence-based Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions for students with learning difficulties.

Changes in Council Positions

There have also been changes in three Council positions: Secretary, Convenor of the Website Committee, and Convenor of the Consultants Committee. **Olivia Connelly**'s new role as Convenor of the Consultants Committee has been acknowledged above. Two of the positions have been filled by existing members of Council, and their new roles deserve special mention here:

Sarah Asome has now taken on the role of Secretary of LDA. Sarah joined LDA Council in October last year. She is currently the Assistant Principal at Bentleigh West Primary School in Victoria. She is well known to our members because of the role she has played in developing phonics-based instruction at Bentleigh West, which has led to marked improvements in literacy levels as indicated by the school's 2018 NAPLAN results. Sarah regularly presents at state and national conferences, and recently presented a highly successful webinar for the LDA WWW series of webinars.

Dr. Bartek Rajkowski has taken on the role of Convenor of the Website Committee. Bartek has been a member of Council since September 2016 and has been an invaluable member of the Website Committee since 2019. Bartek is a speech language pathologist with extensive experience in assessing, identifying and helping students with literacy difficulties, and has been the principal clinician and director of Adelaide Speech Pathology Services since 2001. Bartek is also the creator and managing director of ReadingDoctor Software, a suite of scientifically based, interactive apps designed to improve literacy skills in children. He regularly presents to audiences around Australia on the topics of reading development, reading difficulties and evidence-based literacy instruction.

The information under Council News has been compiled by members of the Bulletin team with input from relevant members of Council.

The Origin of LDA

Learning Difficulties Australia was established in 1965 as the Diagnostic and Remedial Teachers' Association of Victoria. In 1987 it became an Incorporated Association under the name of the Australian Remedial Education Association, and in 1994 the Association was renamed the Australian Resource Educators' Association. There was a further change of name in 2001, when it adopted the current name of Learning Difficulties Australia. Its current Journal, the Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties, was first established in May 1969 under the name Remedial Education (1969 to 1972), and then the Australian Journal of Remedial Education (1973 to March 1996). It was renamed the Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities in June 1996. In 2008 publication of the Journal was taken over by Taylor and Francis, a leading publisher of academic Journals, when it adopted its current name of the Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties.

The history of LDA, by Dr Josephine Jenkinson, was published as a six part series in the Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities over the period March 2006 to March 2007. Copies of this series of papers in the AJLD can be accessed on the LDA website at https://www.ldaustralia.org/lda-history.html.

In this issue of the Bulletin...

Ros Neilson, Editor, LDA Bulletin

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

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

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

The theme of this issue of the LDA Bulletin is 'Learning struggles and resilience'. Our contributors include experienced academics, including several members of very active research teams in Australia, as well as teachers and school administrators who are writing from the chalk face. We thank all our contributors sincerely for their efforts to try to help us to '*climb inside the skin*' of all children as they learn to read and write. Taking this point of view can not only help us to '*get along better*' with students and support their resilience – it can hopefully also help us to teach better.

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

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

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

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

Deanne Francis and Genevieve McArthur from Macquarie University have contributed a summary of a literature survey on reading and emotional health carried out by their international research team. They follow up their findings with a pointer to the practical resources, based on the research evidence, that are available for the public from the Macquarie Centre for Reading. Nicholas Badcock and honours student Sophia Soares extend the discussion to the level of tertiary education, providing evidence relating to the repercussions of reading anxiety in university students.

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

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

We hope you enjoy this issue of the LDA Bulletin!

Ros Neilson
Editor, LDA bulletin

Learning Struggles and Resilience

If children are to develop a belief that their own efforts can bring about successful outcomes in reading, it makes sense to start by teaching them decoding skills and providing them with decodable readers. Learning to read books this way may at first feel like more work for young children than learning to guess from the picture clues – but as **Professor Emeritus James Chapman** argues, if teachers give beginning readers an efficient decoding strategy it lays the groundwork for success in both 'words' and 'mind'.

The keynote article for this issue of the LDA bulletin sets the stage by providing a clear and carefully-researched focus on the experience of young students in the process of learning to read – their sense of themselves and their sense of what they can do to help themselves. What teachers say and do as they help children to learn to read in the early years can have ripple effects for years to come…

Learning to read is about words AND mind

James Chapman

Learning requires not only skills and ability related to learning tasks but also self-beliefs in being able to achieve success (Toste, Didion, Peng, Filderman, & McCleland, 2020). In the context of learning to read, students' self-beliefs about themselves as beginning readers have a powerful influence on motivation. These self-beliefs play a role in determining whether children's engagement in reading activities is sought or avoided, how much effort they put into reading, and how hard they try when faced with difficulties (Henk & Melnick, 1992).

Children who experience initial and ongoing learning difficulties often develop a cluster of negative self-beliefs that impede efforts to provide effective remediation.

Students' achievement-related self-beliefs that contribute to motivation include a variety of associated factors such as self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and causal attributions. Specifically, in relation to learning, *self-concept* refers to the perceptions, knowledge, and beliefs children hold about themselves as learners. *Self-esteem* is more about how children self-evaluate their sense of worth in learning situations. *Self-efficacy* relates to self-confidence and the sense of personal agency in being able to bring about successful outcomes when learning. The opposite of a positive sense of self-efficacy is *learned helplessness*: the idea that "no matter how hard I try it never works so I might as well give up". *Causal attributions* refer to the beliefs individuals have about what causes learning outcomes. In general, children take credit for successful outcomes either because they believe they have the ability, used a good strategy and stuck with the task, or because the teacher or someone else helped them. The former are "internal" causes, whereas the latter is an "external" cause. For unsuccessful outcomes, children might believe they are responsible because they are "dumb" (internal), because they didn't try hard enough and gave up (internal), or because the task was too hard and no one helped them (external). Children who have more positive causal attributions tend to see successful outcomes as the result of their ability, effort and appropriate strategy use, and unsuccessful outcomes as changeable by trying harder and/or changing how they work on a particular task. Children who have more negative causal attributions tend to ascribe unsuccessful learning outcomes to causes that are beyond their control, such as has not having enough ability ("I'm dumb") and/or feeling the task was too hard, not getting enough help, or just plain bad luck.

There is considerable evidence now that self-beliefs children develop about their learning affect achievement motivation and achievement outcomes (e.g., Toste et al., 2020). Children who experience initial and ongoing learning difficulties often develop a cluster of negative self-beliefs that impede efforts to provide effective remediation. This cluster involves developing negative academic self-concepts, loss of self-esteem, diminished beliefs that they can bring about successful learning outcomes, and an overall view that trying hard doesn't work so it's better not to try but to just give up (e.g., Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Chapman, 1988; Chapman & Tunmer, 2003; Zimmerman, 2000). Teachers who do not understand these factors often label children with learning difficulties as 'lazy'. They are not. 'Giving up' is a reasonable psychological reaction to feeling that trying hard and failing is worse than not trying at all.

Research on specific reading-related self-beliefs

Each of these motivational factors has been studied in relation to students' achievement over three to four decades. Less attention, however, has been paid to specific reading-related self-beliefs. To address this lack of focus on specific reading self-beliefs of beginning readers, my colleague, Bill Tunmer, and I developed the *Reading Self-Concept Scale* (RSCS) (Chapman & Tunmer, 1995, 1999). We argued that children's achievement-related self-beliefs were closely related to achievement outcomes when they were more specifically linked to particular achievement areas. Hence, we proposed that specific *reading* self-concepts would be more highly associated with reading achievement outcomes than more general *academic* self-concepts that covered a wider range of achievement situations.

Research with the RSCS revealed a number of important findings:

1. Reading self-concepts develop in relation to initial and ongoing reading achievement during the first 2 ½ years of schooling (Chapman & Tunmer, 1997).
2. Differences in reading self-concept among children appeared within the first 2 months of schooling. In a longitudinal study that followed children from the start of Year 1 to the end of Year 3, general academic self-concept using the *Perception of Ability Scale for Students* (Boersma & Chapman, 1992) was assessed during the middle of Year 3. Three groups were formed based on their academic self-concepts scores: low, average, and high (Chapman, Tunmer, & Prochnow, 2000). Children in the low group had poorer

phonological sensitivity skills and letter-name knowledge when they began schooling at the start of Year 1. By the end of Year 1 and again during the middle of Year 3, children with more negative academic self-concepts read lower level books in class and performed at lower levels on measures of word recognition and reading comprehension than did those children who held more positive academic self-concepts.

3 Reading self-concept was first assessed 6 to 8 weeks after children commenced schooling. Those who had developed more negative academic self-concepts by the middle of Year 3 already felt less competent as readers and had more pessimistic attitudes towards reading after just two months of schooling, compared to those with more positive mid-Year 3 academic self-concepts.

4 Put another way, children who started school without the necessary reading-related language skills quickly developed negative tendencies in terms of reading self-concept and continued to experience reading difficulties over their first three years of schooling. The initial more negative reading self-concepts spread to generalised negative academic self-concepts.

Children in the research referred to above (Chapman et al., 2000; Chapman & Tunmer, 1997) were all in predominantly whole language instructional settings. In the absence of effective initial literacy instruction, coupled with ineffective remedial intervention (such as Reading Recovery; see Chapman, Tunmer, & Prochnow, 2001), negative self-beliefs stemming from ongoing reading difficulties often result in enduring reading problems that tend to spread to other subject areas. As Spear-Swerling and Sternberg (1994) noted, "Once children have entered the 'swamp' of negative expectations, lowered motivation, and limited practice, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to get back on the road to proficient reading" (p. 101).

Implications for remedial reading approaches

Findings of the strong association between both phonological sensitivity and letter-name knowledge and subsequent reading performance, reading self-concept and academic self-concept, raise questions about what can be done to help children who develop reading difficulties become competent readers. To build competence in reading, children need to acquire efficient word recognition strategies, which are necessary for the development of rapid word decoding skills. High levels of automaticity in word recognition in turn frees up cognitive resources for comprehension and text integration processes, both essential for making progress in learning to read. To use reading strategies effectively (e.g., word identification strategies), however, children need to believe that the strategies they are taught to use will be beneficial in helping them read and worth the effort in applying them. This is crucial in terms of motivation.

... word identification strategies based on word-level information are much more reliable than strategies involving contextual guessing.

Positive motivation means that when children come across difficult reading tasks, such as unfamiliar words in text, they know that if they have an effective strategy that has worked in the past and if they persevere, they will likely be successful in working out what the word is. This knowledge relates to the notion of *self-efficacy*, or sense of personal agency in being able to positively cause a successful outcome, such as figuring out an unknown word.

Because word identification strategies are so important for developing efficient word recognition skills during the reading acquisition phase, we examined use of these strategies in relation to reading performance and self-efficacy (Tunmer & Chapman, 2002). In general, two word identification strategies are normally adopted in literacy programs. One involves the 'three-cuing', contextual guessing approach; the other stresses the use of letter-sound patterns.

Depending on sentence context cues and guessing to figure out an unfamiliar word in text is highly unreliable and relatively ineffective, and by definition, must frequently fail those children who use them most. As Jorm and Share (1983) pointed out decades ago, 35-40% of words used in beginning reading materials appear only once. Sentence context is of little use because the average predictability of content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives) in running text is about 10%, compared to about 40% for function words (e.g. *to, the, on*). Such a strategy, with a chance factor of 10% for correctly identifying an unknown word, is highly unreliable.

On the other hand, word identification strategies that are based on word-level information, such as letter-sound patterns, are generative. *Generative* refers to the ability to apply knowledge of how words work when coming across new words. Applying knowledge of letter-sound patterns is generative and is important in helping children to identify unfamiliar words when they come across them. As such, word identification strategies based on word-level information are much more reliable than strategies involving contextual guessing. Consequently, children who have more reliable and effective word identification strategies are more likely to develop proficiency in reading, together with positive reading-related self-beliefs.

For children who develop early and persistent difficulties in learning to read, remedial reading programs should be offered early and should include two key elements to increase the chances of success. The first element addresses the fundamental skills needed for developing proficiency in reading, and the second focuses on strategies for overcoming negative reading-related self-perceptions that typically develop in response to difficulties in learning to read.

Learning to use letter-sound cues is crucial for developing the ability to identify unfamiliar words in text. As Pressley (1998) noted, "the scientific evidence is simply overwhelming that letter-sound cues are more important in recognizing words than either semantic or syntactic cues..." (p. 16), and that heavy reliance on the latter two cues is a "disastrous strategy" for beginning readers (p. 32). For older poor readers, in addition to working on any word decoding deficiencies, explicit and systematic instruction may be needed in the use of comprehension strategies.

As well as working on improving the skills associated with remedying reading difficulties, attention should also be devoted to the negative reading and academic self-perceptions that usually develop from difficulties in learning to read. One commonly used approach is for teachers to *praise* students for their reading, even when a child makes an

incorrect word identification (Chapman, Greaney, Arrow, & Tunmer, 2018). Teachers mistakenly assume that consistent praise will lead to changes in attitudes towards difficult reading tasks, which in turn enhances self-esteem and contributes to improved achievement. However, self-esteem is not the issue here. Rather, for children who struggle with learning to read it is their attitudes and beliefs about themselves as readers that are far more important. Further, there is little evidence that focussing on self-esteem independently of specific work on academic tasks will lead to improved learning outcomes.

Teacher feedback that includes attribution retraining procedures and that are used alongside explicit teaching of key skills required for successful reading acquisition will … boost children's self-confidence and successful learning outcomes.

There is a more useful approach to enhancing the development of self-beliefs. Teacher feedback that includes attribution retraining procedures and that are used alongside explicit teaching of key skills required for successful reading acquisition will do more to boost children's self-confidence and successful learning outcomes. When used with specific skills teaching, attribution retraining involves explicit task-related teacher feedback that is designed to overcome children's self-beliefs that their reading problems are caused by lack of ability ("I'm dumb"), or the learned helpless view that "no matter how hard I try I'll never be a good reader". Teachers can support such children by providing assurances in their feedback that a child has sufficient ability to successfully complete a task that is reasonably challenging ("you can do this…"), with attention focussed on the use of specific skills or strategies as the main way to bring about success in reading ("…when you use our word tools!"). An important point here is that reading/learning tasks should be reasonably challenging, but within the reach of each child. Presenting easy tasks for children to complete contributes to the feeling that success is due to the work being easy more than to children feeling competent.

Teachers' responses to successful word reading outcomes should specifically mention: (1) correct use of the word identification strategy; (2) sticking with it until the word was identified; and, (3) confirmation that the child is able to successfully identify new and sometimes difficult words when the word tools are used. The purpose of this approach is to stress the link between the role of specific strategies and their effortful application in causing successful outcomes.

For unsuccessful word identification attempts or when children encounter difficulties, teacher feedback should focus on: (1) the inadequate or incorrect use of an appropriate strategy that has been taught already; (2) inadequate effort and giving up; and (3) affirming to the child that she/he has the ability and that the problem is about the proper use of strategies. This type of feedback is designed to assist children in developing beliefs that unsuccessful outcomes are not due to lack of ability, which is usually perceived as an enduring, unchangeable factor in poor reading, but to strategy use plus effort, both of which are more under the control of the child.

For example, training in a specific skill might involve the use of "vowel teams". When children use such a word-level strategy to successfully identify unknown words, teacher feedback should emphasise that the outcome was due to the appropriate and effortful application of the strategy. *"Great work Jo. You worked out that the word was 'street' because the vowel team 'ee' makes the long /e/ sound, and you already know a similar sounding word, 'feet'. You read well when you use our word tools."* When a child continues to struggle with figuring out an unknown word, the teacher should focus attention of the inadequate or inappropriate application of a decoding strategy (e.g., guessing, looking at a picture) that led to difficulty in identifying the word. At that point, the teacher may ask to child to re-apply an appropriate strategy, or a more useful strategy may need to be re-taught. The emphasis should be on the strategy, rather than the child *per se* (Craven, Marsh, & Debus, 1991).

It's useful for teachers to be mindful that protecting children from the consequences of experiencing difficulties by overlooking mistakes, or by offering rewards or praise for incorrect or inadequate work, is not helpful in changing negative self-perceptions. Indeed, such feedback is deceitful. From an attributions point of view, false feedback denies children the opportunity to learn from mistakes and to develop a positive and genuine sense of personal agency.

Conclusion

A comprehensive approach to remediation is required for children to overcome both skill deficiencies in reading and any associated negative reading-related self-beliefs. For beginning readers, the development of word-level skills and strategies is essential and the simple view of reading provides a useful framework to do this (Tunmer & Hoover, 2019). In addition, attribution retraining involving task-specific and honest teacher feedback provides a positive approach for teachers to assist their children overcome the negative self-beliefs that can impede remedial instruction. As Lepola, Salonen and Vauras (2000) noted some time ago, there needs to be a shift from a "pure cognitive interpretation to (a) motivational and emotional co-determination of beginning reading skills" (p. 175). Learning to read is about words AND the mind!

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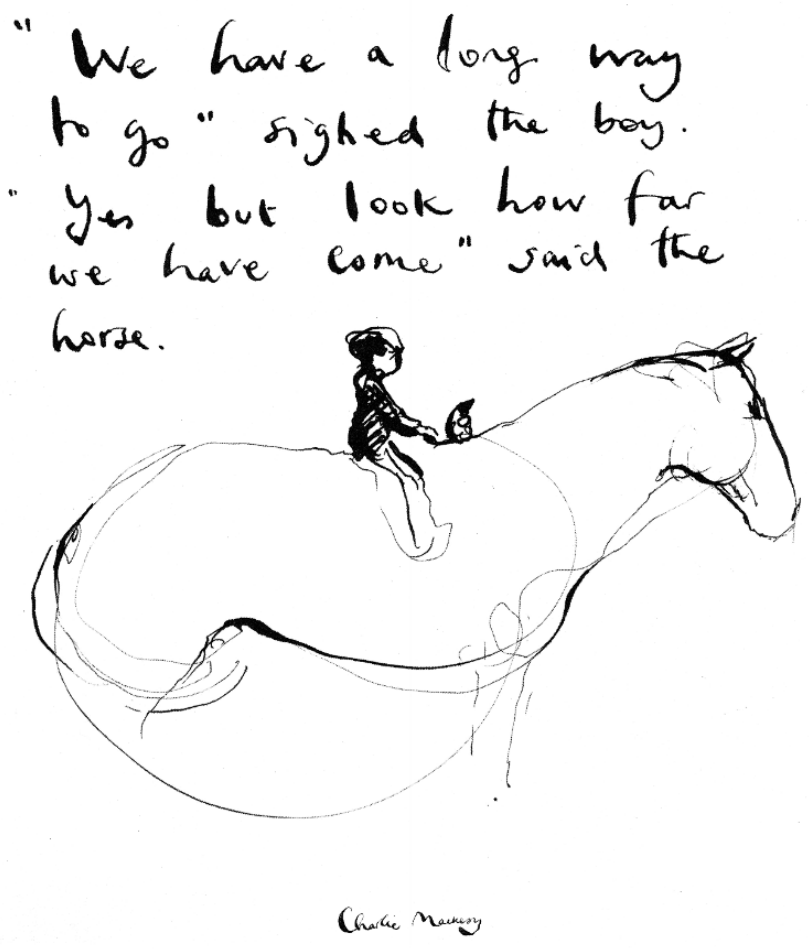

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Understanding links between reading difficulties, self-esteem, and child mental health

Mark Boyes, **Suze Leitão**, **Mary Claessen**, **Nicholas Badcock** and **Mandy Nayton** are members of a highly collaborative team of researchers spanning Curtin University, University of Western Australia, Macquarie University, and Dyslexia-SPELD Foundation, Perth. In this article they provide an update on some of their research into child mental health issues associated with reading difficulties, reporting on themes emerging from careful qualitative research, an analysis of clinical casefiles, and providing a heads-up about a promising small-group intervention program to support the mental health of children with reading difficulties.

Reading difficulties are the most common learning difficulty in Australia. Approximately 10% of children have significant and severe reading difficulties, representing between two and four children in a typical Australian primary school classroom. Reading difficulties can severely impact children's lives; indeed, the notion that children who struggle with reading experience poor self-esteem is widely reported, and is a generally accepted position held by many in the community, including teachers and educators, counsellors, educational psychologists, clinical service providers, as well as family members.

Given the significance placed on reading within our school system and in so much of our day-to-day lives, the expectation that children who struggle with reading are also likely to experience poor self-esteem makes intuitive sense. Consistent with this, many adults report that having a reading difficulty had a devastating impact on their self-esteem as they navigated their way, painfully and fearfully, through school.

A compelling example of this was outlined in a recent edition of *Australian Story*, featuring the highly awarded Australian portrait artist, Vincent Fantauzzo (Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2019). In the program Vincent described school as *"a place I associate with hiding, or shame, or low self-confidence. I honestly felt like I must be stupid"*. He also described his feelings of anxiety, and the lengths he would go to in order to avoid detection, *"I hid it from my mum. I hid it from my brother and sister. You become the funny kid in class or the naughty kid. I would prefer to be kicked out of class than stand up and read a book out loud"*. After dropping out

of school at the age of 13, barely able to read or write, Vincent managed to hustle his way into RMIT University, where he worked tirelessly, and has since achieved very significant success as a portrait artist. However, it took many years for Vincent to come to terms with his reading difficulties, and to feel accepted for who he is.

Vincent's school experiences are not unique. Many children, adolescents and adults report feeling a sense of shame and frustration about their reading difficulties, and also report poor self-esteem. This is by no means always the case, however, and many children with reading difficulties remain confident, resilient, and optimistic about their academic and employment choices.

Understanding why some children with reading difficulties struggle with self-esteem issues, while others do not, is an important line of inquiry.

The scientific literature confirms that some children with reading difficulties are at elevated risk of experiencing emotional difficulties, including poor self-esteem (particularly academic-related self-esteem – see McArthur et al., 2020), as well as symptoms of both anxiety and depression (Francis et al., 2019). However, exactly *why* reading difficulties are associated with poor child mental health outcomes is unclear. Clarifying this relationship is important for two reasons. Firstly, it may allow the early identification of children who are particularly likely to struggle emotionally, as well as those who may be resilient to emotional problems. Secondly, understanding this association may highlight potential risk factors and resilience-promoting factors that can be targeted in mental health programs.

Our research team initially published a 'roadmap' paper (Boyes et al., 2016) that outlined a program of research that we believed could provide a solid foundation for systematically investigating why children with reading difficulties may be vulnerable to emotional problems. The aim was to identify factors that might indicate particular vulnerability (or resilience) and provide a foundation for the development of interventions promoting mental health among children who struggle with reading. We also called for more collaboration between researchers and clinical service providers (see Box 1 for an outline of the specific research suggestions).

In this article we provide a brief update on the mental health research that our research team has been conducting in collaboration with the Dyslexia-SPELD Foundation (DSF) since that roadmap paper was published. For our research, we adopt a socio-ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). That is, we view children as being at the centre of a network of interacting influences, including relationships with family and friends, the contextual environment (e.g. school and community influences), as well as cultural and societal factors (including policy and political influences). Importantly, resources in one area are argued to buffer against difficulties in another.

Interviews with children with reading difficulties, parents, and educators

In order to better understand the experience of living with reading difficulties, we first conducted semi-structured interviews with children and their parents (Leitão et al., 2017), and a group of educators (teachers and tutors) who work with children with reading difficulties (Claessen et al., 2020). We analysed the interview data thematically (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A number of common themes were identified in the interviews with children, their parents, and educators.

All participants mentioned the impact of reading difficulties on children's mental health. Children reported a range of emotional challenges, such as feelings of sadness, disappointment and frustration, particularly when comparing themselves to their peers and reflecting on their difficulties in carrying out academic tasks. Parents talked about the challenges in supporting their children's mental health, particularly their children's lack of confidence, an unwillingness to try new things, and an established pattern of academic failure. Educators reflected on their observations of the links between reading difficulties, low self-esteem, and poor self-confidence in the education setting. Educators also identified the transition to high school as being particularly difficult for children who struggle with reading. Within the school setting, bullying, victimisation and difficulties with peer relationships, as well as poor connection with school and difficulties in teacher relationships, were highlighted as factors putting children at risk for mental health problems.

Understanding why some children with reading difficulties struggle with self-esteem issues, while others do not, is an important line of inquiry.

The process of receiving a diagnosis of a reading difficulty was identified as important by children, parents, and educators. Receiving a diagnosis was important for children, as it often provided an explanation for the challenges they experienced with reading and learning, and enabled them to focus on their strengths as well as their weaknesses. Parents and educators reflected on their perceptions of how children responded to a diagnosis, providing examples of reactions that were both positive (e.g. children obtaining a sense of resolution or relief, and an acknowledgement that they are not 'dumb') and negative (e.g. children feeling shame and that they are different too other children, or that something is wrong with them). Parents also reported using the process of diagnosis, and the specific nature of their child's difficulties with reading, to help with identifying areas of relative strength to build self-worth and self-esteem.

Both children and educators described the important role of parents in providing academic and emotional support. Consistent with this, parents reflected on having to adopt roles such as 'tutor', 'fighter', 'counsellor' and 'advocate' for their child, roles that took them beyond the traditional notion of being a parent. Children indicated that having a teacher with a knowledge and understanding of reading difficulties was important, and parents indicated that teachers could be both inhibitors and facilitators to the development and education of children with reading difficulties.

Summary of research suggestions

- Carry out in-depth interviews with children, parents, educators, and clinicians to identify potential risk and resilience-promoting factors identified by stakeholders
- Collaborate with clinical service providers to use detailed clinical records to identify factors associated with mental health among children with reading difficulties
- Evaluate the effectiveness of mental health promotion programs for children who struggle with reading
- Include brief measures of mental health when implementing reading interventions, to test if improvements in reading are associated with improvements in mental health

Box 1. Summary of research suggestions (Boyes et al., 2016)

Summary of risk and resilience-promoting factors

Risk Factors	Resilience-promoting Factors
• Low self-esteem • Academic failure • Shame, stigma and feeling 'different' • Experiences of being bullied • Peer relationship problems • Teacher training (early literacy) • Unsupportive teachers and school staff • Transition to high school • Financial cost and lack of resources • Lack of government recognition (and associated funding/resources)	• Early diagnosis • Identifying any child strengths • Positive general self-concept or perception • Strong relationship with parents • Strong relationships with friends/ peers • Strong and supportive teacher relationships • Supportive school environment • Connection with school

Box 2. Summary of risk and resilience-promoting factors identified in the child, parent, and educator interviews (Leitão et al. 2017; Claessen et al. 2020).

Parents also reflected on a range of broader themes, including a need for recognition of the issues surrounding access to (and the cost of) the extra support they sought for their child (e.g. assessment, tutoring, and speech pathology services), the importance of teacher training in the areas of reading development and early literacy, and the lack of government resources and financial support for children with reading difficulties.

Taken together, the findings from the interviews with children, parents, and educators identified a variety of risk and resilience-promoting factors associated with child mental health (see Box 2). Importantly, these factors span a range of levels. Perhaps unsurprisingly, children tended to focus on individual, family, and school-related experiences, whereas parents and educators were better able to contextualise reading difficulties within broader societal and cultural contexts.

Analysis of clinical casefiles

While the interviews with children, parents, and educators provided us with rich and detailed data, the small number of people interviewed means that we need to be cautious in generalising these findings too broadly. To complement these interviews, we conducted an analysis of data extracted from Dyslexia SPELD Foundation (DSF) casefiles (Boyes et al. 2020a).

DSF conducts over 1500 assessments each year, and the majority of parents give consent for this data to be used in research and evaluation. A casefile is created for each child and, along with results from assessments of literacy and reading-related achievement, casefiles also include parent-reported information on behavioural, social, and emotional development. This provided a unique opportunity to draw on these detailed clinical records to identify factors associated with mental health among children with reading difficulties. We collated the 1235 casefiles of school-aged children who had received a dyslexia diagnosis from DSF in 2014 and 2015 and then randomly selected a subset of 450 casefiles for data extraction. Consistent with previous studies, we noted significant rates of low self-esteem, as well as behavioural and emotional problems. Low self-esteem and behavioural difficulties were reported for around 25% of children, while rates of emotional difficulties were reported for around 10% of the children. This pattern of findings likely reflects the fact that behavioural problems are observable and tend to create difficulties in the classroom and at home, in contrast with emotional difficulties which are often hidden. Importantly, it should be highlighted that not all children experienced low self-esteem, behavioural, or emotional issues; indeed the majority of children had not experienced any of these. This reminds us of the importance of understanding, and identifying, which children with reading difficulties may struggle with self-esteem, as well as behavioural and emotional problems.

In terms of potential risk and resilience-promoting factors, in our analysis of the DSF casefiles we identified four factors that appeared to be important in identifying children who had experienced emotional and behavioural problems: (1) low self-esteem, (2) experiencing peer problems and being bullied, (3) difficulties with regulating emotion, and (4) social skills difficulties. Of note, these findings are broadly consistent with the factors identified as being important by the children, parents, and educators we had interviewed previously, and we believe that they might be good intervention targets for programs aiming to promote mental health among children with reading difficulties.

Mental health programs for struggling readers: the 'Clever Kids' program

DSF has identified increased demand for psychosocial support, with growing expectation that it be

Children attending *Clever Kids*.

offered in addition to targeted reading intervention. However, there are few mental health programs developed specifically to be accessible for children with reading difficulties. One exception is *Success and Dyslexia*, a coping program, which has a particular focus on children with reading and other learning difficulties (Firth and Frydenberg, 2011). However, this program is implemented school wide, with the learning difficulties coping program nested within a broader whole-school program. Whole-school programs can be difficult to implement, as they need a concerted effort by school administration and staff. DSF have therefore adapted the *Success and Dyslexia* program and developed *Clever Kids*, a nine-week mental health program that is delivered by DSF psychologists in small groups (approximately 10 children) outside of school hours. The small group structure also gives participants an opportunity to meet other children similarly struggling with reading.

... parents reflected on having to adopt roles such as 'tutor,' 'fighter,' 'counsellor' and 'advocate' for their child, roles that took them beyond the traditional notion of being a parent.

Clever Kids focuses on the development of coping and emotion regulation skills, resilience and self-esteem (factors identified as being linked with mental health outcomes in our previous studies), as well as problem-solving skills, perseverance, and help-seeking behaviour. In addition, it includes a combination of explicit instruction, modelling, role-playing, and ongoing revision of concepts being taught (see Appendix for an outline of the program structure). The activities have been designed to be accessible for children with reading difficulties, and parents are kept informed of content so they can support their children in practicing skills taught in the program.

We have recently completed a small randomised-controlled trial of *Clever Kids* (Boyes et al., 2020b, manuscript under review). Our findings showed attending *Clever Kids* improved children's coping skills and there were also promising improvements in self-esteem and reductions in emotional problems. The program also appears to be acceptable to children with dyslexia and their families.

What have we learned, and where to next?

Our interviews with children, parents, educators, as well as our exploration of DSF case files, highlight that although rates of emotional difficulties are indeed higher among struggling readers, many children with reading difficulties are very resilient. Our research has identified a number of risk and resilience-promoting factors (summarised in Box 2) that can help us better understand why some children with reading difficulties may struggle emotionally, while others may not. Together, our findings point to the need to support children with reading difficulties at multiple levels – taking into consideration the unique experiences of each child, as well as the important role of family, peers, teachers and schools, government, and broader society in understanding the emotional impacts of reading difficulties.

Children and parents both highlighted the positive influence of educators who understood (and believed in) reading difficulties, as well as the protective nature of high quality relationships with teachers and schools on emotional wellbeing.

Regarding mental health promotion, our preliminary trial of the *Clever Kids* program has identified promising improvements in self-esteem and some reduction in emotional problems among struggling readers. In addition, the children enjoyed the program, particularly the social (and normalising) aspects of meeting other children who also struggle with reading. However, this was only a small pilot study; we have recently received funding to conduct a larger trial of Clever Kids, which we hope will confirm the program is having a positive effect.

The final recommendation in our 'roadmap' paper on reading difficulties and mental health (Boyes et al., 2016) was to include brief measures of emotional health before and after implementing reading interventions, to test if any improvements in reading correlate with improvements in child self-esteem and mental health. We have not yet investigated this, but we believe it remains an important question, and is an area in which clinical service providers and researchers could collaborate very fruitfully.

Conclusions

We hope our research identifies aspects of classroom practice that teachers can reflect on to better support children with reading difficulties. Children and parents both highlighted the positive influence of educators who understood (and believed in) reading difficulties, as well as the protective nature of high-quality relationships with teachers and schools on emotional wellbeing. This understanding and acceptance is an important foundation for supporting children with reading difficulties in educational settings. To develop this foundation, there is a need for schools and teachers to be provided with high quality evidence-informed information and support (DSF Literacy and Clinical Services, 2019). We believe that together parents, teachers, schools, clinical service providers, and researchers play a crucial role in supporting children with reading difficulties, and that it is through advocating together, to amplify our voices, that we can best support the children with whom we work.

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Conflicts of Interest

Mandy Nayton is the Chief Executive Officer of the Dyslexia-SPELD Foundation. Suze Leitão is a board member of the Dyslexia-SPELD Foundation. Mark Boyes and Mary Claessen are members of the Dyslexia-SPELD Foundation.

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Appendix

Outline of the *Clever Kids* program

Week	Topic	Content of the session
1	Introduction to the program and identifying personal strengths	Establishes that everyone in the group has reading difficulties, and that the group provides an opportunity to talk to other children likely to have experienced similar difficulties. Emphasises that although individuals with dyslexia may face challenges, they have many strengths as well. Students reflect on personal strengths and accomplishments
2	What do reading difficulties mean to me?	Discusses what reading difficulties are and provides students with opportunities to share how this impacts them. Highlights that students can be successful despite their learning difficulties.
3	How do you cope?	Introduces concepts of coping and emotion regulation. Explores different ways of coping and managing emotions and highlights that different strategies are useful in different situations. Discuss how to make helpful choices about coping with difficulties and managing emotions.
4	What are your goals?	Introduces SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time limited) goals and highlights how helpful coping and emotion regulation strategies are important in pursuing goals (particularly in planning and responding to problems as they arise).
5	Problem solving and managing negative emotions	Re-emphasises information from sessions 3 and 4 and applies it specifically to stress (and bodily manifestations of stress). Outlines fight, flight, freeze responses, and teaches specific stress regulation strategies (e.g. breathing exercises).
6	Choosing powerful thoughts	Introduces links between thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. Discusses how to identify and challenge unhelpful thoughts and self-beliefs. Provides an opportunity to apply positive thinking strategies to situations students identify as difficult.
7	Why be assertive?	Discusses differences between being assertive, aggressive, and passive (and potential outcomes of these). Highlights how to respond to difficulties by assertively trying to improve the situation, rather than acting aggressively towards others or withdrawing from the situation.
8	Assertiveness skills	Students have the opportunity to practice assertive verbal and non-verbal behaviour, including making assertive requests and using assertive body language.
9	Revision and integration	Reviews the concepts, skills, and strategies that have been covered in the program. Provides an opportunity for students to reflect on the progress they have made over the course of the program. Celebrates the successful completion of the program.

Box 3. Outline of the nine-week *Clever Kids* program (Boyes et al., 2020b)

Casualties in a game of hit and miss: Reading trajectories, identification of concerns and provision of support in the early years of schooling

Linda Graham, Sonia White, Haley Tancredi and **Pamela Snow** summarise a recently published article (*Graham et al., 2020*) in which they explored teachers' concerns about children in their classes, and the corresponding supports provided to the children.

How should teachers respond when they are concerned about behaviour problems in the classroom? Could a test like the Phonics Screening check (*https://www.education.gov.au/year-1-phonics-check*) contribute to their decision-making? Misty Adoniou, writing for the Australian Association for Research in Education, has claimed that the Phonics Check "doesn't tell teachers anything they didn't know already… [or] what kind of instructional intervention their identified strugglers need." (Adoniou, 2017, np *https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=2533*). But Linda Graham and her colleagues provide evidence that teachers could indeed benefit from more support in identifying and supporting students with reading difficulties, and that a decoding assessment might play a critical role. If you want to know what wobble chairs have to do with the topic, read on …

Study aims and background

For all children, learning to read is one of the most significant and fundamental achievements in their early school years. Reading competence is closely linked with increased academic outcomes, access to postsecondary education and training, and improved vocational opportunities (Castles et al., 2018). As some 5-10% of children will continue to experience literacy difficulties despite high-quality initial reading instruction (Partanen & Seigel, 2014), it is critical to identify those children early, and to provide timely evidence-based, targeted supports (Fuchs et al., 2008) as part of a multi-tiered system of support aimed at preventing the consequences of entrenched reading difficulties. These consequences can include disengaged and disruptive behaviour, suspension and exclusion, early school leaving, under- and unemployment, and engagement with the youth justice system (Graham et al., 2020).

Are early signs of literacy difficulty generally recognised and responded to appropriately in the classroom? Teachers are often quick to identify students who exhibit attentional and behaviour difficulties (Hecht & Greenfield, 2002). However, previous research suggests that educators cannot always identify the antecedents of problematic behaviour, and some find it difficult to identify and provide appropriate supports (Graham, 2015). Given the high proportion of students with behaviour concerns who experience underlying (and often undiagnosed) language disorder (Clegg et al., 2009; Ripley & Yuill, 2005) and the interplay between language and reading difficulties (Snow, 2016), it is essential that teachers are supported to 'look below the surface' to understand what students' behaviours might be communicating, and what supports/adjustments are therefore needed. As teachers play a critical role in identifying students who may require support and directing students towards appropriate avenues for support (Cohen et al., 1993), this study investigated the alignment between students' early word-reading trajectories and teachers' concerns about their students and the supports they reported providing.

Research context and approach

This article drew on empirical data generated through the 'Supporting Behaviour in the Early Years' project.

The project, funded by the Financial Markets Foundation for Children and the Australian Research Council, has been investigating the emergence of disruptive behaviour in students, and has been exploring the question of whether changes in teaching practice might be helpful. The data collection has been longitudinal, carried out for six years in seven participating Queensland state schools.

The participating schools serve disadvantaged communities with Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) ranges between 1 and 2 standard deviations below the mean. While approaches to early reading instruction vary in the Australian context, the most common approach, supported by the Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA), involves following a 'Balanced Literacy' strategy in the early years, where various forms of phonics instruction tend to be embedded within a context that focusses on meaning.

The recently published Graham et al. (2020) article presents data relating to 118 children from the participating schools who were tracked from Grades 1 to 3 during the course of this research project.

Each year these students completed the standardised *Test of Word Reading Efficiency – Second Edition* (TOWRE-2; Torgesen et al., 2012). The TOWRE-2 comprises sight word reading and phonemic decoding of pseudowords – an assessment strategy very similar to the Phonics Check that has been the topic of much heated debate in Australia. Standardised scores on the TOWRE-2 are age-normed, and may be interpreted in terms of achievement categories. The 'average' range on the TOWRE-2 corresponds to standard scores of 90 – 110; standard scores above 111 are 'above average'; and standard scores below 89 are 'below average', with scores less than 80 considered 'poor' and less than 70 'very poor'.

In addition to the collection of data on the TOWRE-2, each year all students' classroom teachers participated in a semi-structured interview probing their concerns about the students' learning and behaviour and asking for information about the support that was being provided to the students. Each classroom teacher's responses about concerns and supports were mapped against individual changes in the student's reading achievement from Grade 1 to Grade 3.

In the results reported below, the groups' overall TOWRE-2 trends are documented, and patterns of change in reading achievement from one TOWRE achievement category to another are tracked against the information provided in the teacher interviews about concerns and supports provided.

Results: Word reading efficiency

In the sample of 118 children, the mean word reading efficiency standard scores on the TOWRE-2 declined significantly from Grade 1 to Grade 3. A similar pattern of decline was found when sight word reading and pseudoword decoding were analysed separately, although the pattern of decline in sight word reading from one grade to the next reached statistical significance only by Grade 3. Pseudoword reading standard scores were, on average, significantly lower than real word recognition at all grade levels.

The decline in word reading efficiency did not affect all students equally. At an individual level, most students stayed within the same TOWRE-2 achievement category (as described above). Some students improved and moved to a higher category at some point during the three years; almost half of these improvers were children who spoke English as an additional language or dialect. Just under 20 per cent of students in the sample declined in efficiency of word reading at some point. Overall, there was a decline in the number of 'above average' students in each year, with a proportionate increase in the number who were only in the 'average' range. There was a persistently high number who remained in the 'below average' throughout. Relative to the total sample, the consistently 'below average range' group contained disproportionally high numbers of boys, and disproportionally high numbers of students who were from English speaking, rather than linguistically diverse, backgrounds.

... it is essential that teachers are supported to 'look below the surface' to understand what students' behaviours might be communicating, and what supports/ adjustments are therefore needed.

For the purposes of this article we will focus on three sub-groups within the sample who showed distinctive patterns of change in TOWRE achievement categories over the three years: those who improved overall (n=7), those who declined overall (n=10), and those who were persistently below average over the three years (n=26). These were the three groups that showed the highest levels of reported concerns from teachers over the three years.

Results: Teacher concerns and supports provided

Improving group (n=7).

- Students in this group had word reading efficiency scores that were in the below average range in Grade 1 but had improved to at least the average range by Grade 3.

Wobble chairs

- Teachers had concerns about six of the seven students in this group and the focus of their concerns were relatively consistent over time (e.g., typically concerns related to learning or both learning *and* behaviour).
- Not all students in the improving group who attracted teacher concerns received support. Where support was provided, most students received English as a Second Language (ESL) support and one student received speech pathology support. Only four of the seven students in this group received support that was specifically related to reading during Grades 1-3.

Declining group (n=10).

- Students in this group had word reading efficiency scores that were in the average range in Grade 1 but had declined below average by Grade 3. The decline was most severe in pseudoword reading, with some slipping to standard scores of below 80, putting them into the 'poor' or 'very poor' achievement categories.
- Teachers had concerns about seven of the 10 children in Grade 1 but only four of the same 10 children in Grades 2 and 3, despite evidence of a decline in reading competence. Teachers also did not express concerns about the same students in consecutive years, with only one child in 10 drawing concerns from their teachers across Grades 1-3.
- Almost half the students in this group were not receiving additional support in each year from Grades 1-3. For the six students receiving support in Grade 1, one received support for speech, one for oral language, one for numeracy, gross motor and generic 'literacy' support and one had additional floating teacher aide support in the classroom. Only one child received specific reading-related support in any year, and this was the same child (in Grades 1 and 3).

Persistently below average group (n=26).

- The 26 students in this group all demonstrated persistently below-average word reading efficiency scores at each of the three timepoints. Many students in this group also tended to slip from 'below average' into the 'poor' and 'very poor' subcategories over time. None were in the 'very poor' category in Grade 1 but by Grade 3, 15 children had fallen into this category.
- Teachers' concerns were consistent across Grades 1-3 for only seven of these 26 children. Worryingly, teachers reported *no* concerns about six of these children at least once across the three years.
- Despite persistently poor word-level reading scores and relatively stable teacher concerns, the number of students receiving no support in this group increased from Grade 1 to Grade 3. Although 21 of the 26 received some support in Grade 1, this support was largely generic: additional teacher aide time, social skills support, and/or supports of questionable efficacy, e.g. wobble chairs. Only 10 students in this group received reading-related support at *any* time in Grades 1 to 3, and for most this occurred only once and was not sustained or systematic.

Discussion: Reading Progress

For the overall sample of 118 children in the seven participating schools, our analyses of results on the TOWRE-2 revealed a significant decline in scaled scores over time relative to age norms. While declines were demonstrated in both phonemic decoding and word recognition, the decline was significantly greater in children's phonemic decoding skills. Given that both phonemic decoding and word recognition skills are necessary for reading competence and access to the school curriculum beyond the early years, these results are concerning. It is notable that a recent longitudinal study indicated that early decoding and oral language skills explained 99.7% of the variance in reading comprehension at 7 years of age (Hjetland et al., 2019). These were schools in which the gap in literacy skills was starting to widen.

Our analyses did, however, identify a small group of students that demonstrated improved phonemic decoding and word recognition over time. Almost half of these students were from a language background other than English. It is likely that access to ESL and speech pathology support, as well as immersion in an English-speaking learning environment contributed to these students' profiles of improvement.

Another important finding from this study was the relative deterioration in phonemic decoding and word recognition skills in the 'declining' and 'persistently below average' groups. Children in these groups were doing better in Grade 1, relative to age norms, than they were in Grade 3. Further, the decline over time from the 'below average' to 'poor' or 'very poor' subcategories indicates that these students' reading difficulties were becoming more severe as they moved through their early school years, and that they did not receive effective reading support or intervention. Rather, if they were provided with support it was in the form of wobble chairs or behaviour plans. It should also be noted that extra teacher aide time was the most common support provided, and this resulted in students with the greatest need for one-to-one qualified teacher assistance being under the supervision of the least qualified practitioner in the room for their special learning needs.

Teachers typically worked on the assumption that behaviour affected learning.

The findings from this study also challenge the proposition that social background or language background can be used as an explanation for these academic difficulties. All students in this study attended schools in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Further, all students in the declining group were demonstrating phonemic decoding and word recognition skills in the average or above average range in Grade 1, but their skills declined to below average in subsequent years. Even the 26 children in the persistently below group were doing better in Grade 1 than they were in Grade 3. It cannot therefore be claimed that these results are the consequence of home background, given that home background would have been a contributing factor across grades, and appears to have set the children up for potential success at the outset.

Discussion: Supports provided

Teachers' ability to accurately identify and match need with appropriate support is essential for positive learning outcomes (Cohen et al., 1993). During interviews, we asked teachers whether the children they had raised concerns about were receiving additional support and if so, what types of support they were receiving. All teachers in this study interpreted 'additional support' to mean support beyond their own teaching.

This included formal behaviour plans, guidance counselling, extra teacher aide time, or participation in programs that focused on social skills or literacy. No teachers described inclusive practices, such as making reasonable adjustments, as examples of additional support. The most common type of support reported was teacher aide time.

There were clear discrepancies between teachers' reported concerns and the type(s) of support provided. In some cases, while teachers expressed no concerns about a student, the student was nevertheless in receipt of support(s). Conversely, teachers expressed concerns about other students who were not receiving supports.

The findings from this study also challenge the proposition that social background or language background can be used as an explanation for these academic difficulties.

Overall, our analyses of teachers' reported concerns and provision of supports revealed variability in both the existence and type of concern. Teachers in this study rarely mentioned reading as an area of concern, and rarely considered that behaviour might be an indication of underlying learning difficulties – even with the group who were persistently 'below average' in terms of word reading efficiency. Teachers typically worked on the assumption that behaviour affected learning. This points to the possibility that behaviour may act as a 'red herring', resulting in behaviour interventions, at the expense of looking at underlying academic difficulties and providing targeted support for learning (Graham, 2008).

Conclusions

Persistent early reading difficulties typically result in ongoing academic underachievement and negative trajectories related to school engagement, behaviour, and attendance. It is essential that students who present with early reading difficulties are identified and supported in the early years, using timely, targeted evidence-based interventions. Classroom teachers play a critical role in identifying at-risk students and facilitating support. This research suggests that more fine-grained evidence-based assessments are needed to accurately identify children experiencing early reading difficulties. The identification of weaknesses needs to be sensitive to the possibility that early strengths in sight word knowledge can mask potential serious difficulties with decoding.

Teachers' reported concerns indicated that some children's externalising behaviours may distract teachers from identifying reading difficulties. When support is provided, it is often generic or behaviour-related, whereas targeted, evidence-based reading intervention is comparatively rare. Departmental level policies that mandate the use of word-level reading tasks, such as the Phonics Screening Check, could assist teachers to accurately identify students experiencing early reading difficulties (Wheldall et al., 2019).

The misalignment between teachers' reported concerns and the support that they report providing, points to a potential need to provide teachers with opportunities to engage in professional learning to help them better interpret students' presenting difficulties, which would build their knowledge and confidence in making more accurate support recommendations.

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LDA Weekly Wednesday Webinars

2020 Program May to December

Webinars are generally available on the LDA YouTube Channel after they have been presented:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTIx6qtzWNgbPxz5fYzjYcw/videos

Date	Presenter	Topic
13 May	Lyn Stone	Metalanguage (available via a link on the LDA channel)
20 May	David Morkunas	Spaced interleaved and retrieval practice: The key to long-term retention
27 May	Kate Jacobs	Specific Learning Disorders
3 June	Kate deBruin	Using universal design principles to support every student
10 June	Steven Capp	Bentleigh West Primary School: Building collective efficacy using evidence informed approaches
17 June	Sally Robinson-Kooi	Preparing classroom teachers to teach EALD students
15 July	Emily Hanford	Why the Science of Reading should be used in all schools
22 July	Sarah Asome	Response to Intervention
29 July	Michael Roberts	How the science of learning can transform a school.
8 August	Alison Clarke	Spelling
12 August	Ray Boyd	Whole-of-school structures to support highly effective teaching
19 August	Tessa Daffern	Assessment-informed practices in teaching spelling
26 August	David Morkunas (repeat)	Spaced interleaved and retrieval practice: The key to long-term retention
2 September	Toni Hatten-Roberts	Bridging the gap between cognitive science and classroom practice
9 September	Jennifer Buckingham	The Primary Reading Pledge
30 September	Tanya Serry	Decodable vs predictable vs authentic books for young readers?
7 October	Bartek Rajowski	The Reading Doctor
14 October	Anne Castles	Teaching 'sight words': Myths and methods
21 October	TBA	
28 October	Pam Snow	Language, literacy, and disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline
4 November	Louisa Moats	Speech to Print
11 November	Jenny Baker	Sentence construction
18 November	Pam Kastner	The Science of Reading
25 November	Lorraine Hammond	Explicit Instruction
2 December	Various	The year in review: A summary of the major developments in 2020

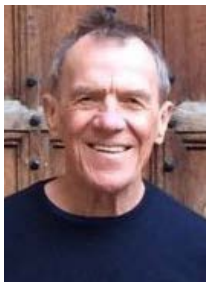
What do you call someone who is disruptive in class?

Tom Nicholson begins with a painfully recognisable set of observations of a teacher's efforts to deal with a five-year-old child – actual teacher comments that he had collected over several months in a Year 1 class. This article summarises some relevant research on behaviour problems and learning difficulties, and provides some ideas for helping students like James and his teacher.

Eyes this way, James.
Yes, James, I like the way you put your hands up.
Good listening James.
James is sitting very nicely.
James, move away from Kevin please.
James, sit up please.
James, this is the tenth time I've talked to you. Sit up, you need to be listening.
James, you are meant to be listening.
James, do I need to see your Mum? You need to sort out your behaviour.
James, I will write your name on the board if you continue to be silly on the mat – or else you will go to another class.
That's your last chance, James.
James!

The above observations of the interaction between James and his teacher are very familiar. Interestingly, although James' teacher focused on behaviour issues, she knew there were other issues driving his behaviour - namely difficulties with reading. When James was asked about his reading and writing, his own comment was "I'm dumb." As a Year 1 student, and so young, James' behaviour would typically be described as merely a 'nuisance' (Merrett & Wheldall, 1984). Nevertheless, even at this early age, the prognosis did not seem to be good, and there was a chance that the future for James might include a label of ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), or, EBD (emotional and behaviour difficulties). Was there anything to stop this from happening? It was clear that he could hardly read or write anything even after a year in school. It raised the question, are his behaviour issues causing his reading problem or is the reading problem causing the behaviour issues? If we addressed the literacy issues early and quickly, could we prevent behaviour issues? The research shows that although we can assess emotional and behavioural difficulties and give them a label (EBD) this might mask the real problem, which is that the student is struggling with basic literacy skills.

The label EBD may be applied to students who are disruptive in class, or who are withdrawn or lacking in concentration, or show other behavioural disturbances (Pirrie & Macleod, 2009). The prevalence of the use of the label varies from one percent to six percent, depending on how the 'disorder' is defined (Kaufmann, 2001). Several studies indicate that teachers regard behaviour difficulties as a major issue (Osher, Osher & Smith, 1994; Elam & Rose, 1995; McDaniel, 1986). Behavioural disturbances not infrequently result in exclusion from school (Imich, 1994); in England as many as 4.5 percent of pupils are excluded from school, mainly for persistent disruptive behaviour or physical assaults (Department for Education, 2010) and in New Zealand the exclusion rate is nearly three percent (Education Counts, 2020)



The long-term outcome for students who are classified as EBD is not good (Levy & Chard, 2001). Landrum, Katsyannis and Archwamety (2004) indicate that in the United States the chances are very high that students who are labelled EBD will drop out of school and be unable to find even part time work, and at least 50 per cent are likely to find themselves in police custody at some stage.

... are his behaviour issues causing the reading problem or is the reading problem causing the behaviour issues?

It is difficult for teachers in the classroom to cope with students who are running wild. Teaching reading or other basic skills to students who have serious EBD is probably the last thing on the teacher's mind – it is clearly frequently more urgent to get them settled or even taken out of the classroom. Mavropoulou and Padeliadu (2002) report that teachers tend to consider a problem

like EBD is related to home issues, rather than school issues, and that if EBD students are provided with special education help at school, the support tends to focus on improving social skills.

But there is an argument for trying to see things from a different perspective. The point is that academic problems are common with some (not all) students with EBD (Coleman & Vaughn, 2000; De Lugt, 2007), and academic assistance is often sorely needed as well as help with social skills. A meta-analysis comparing the achievement of EBD and non-EBD students (based on 25 studies and nearly 2,500 students) found an effect size of -.64, indicating a very large deficit in the academic skills of the EBD groups (Reid et al, 2004). A study tracking the progress of EBD students compared with learning disabled (LD) students over a five year period in the United States found that EBD students made hardly any progress in reading compared with LD students, even though they received more special education services (Anderson, Kutash & Duchnowski, 2001).

There is evidence, moreover, that making progress in literacy may be important in reducing the incidence of behaviour problems (Reschley, 2010; Pierce et al., 2004). A one-year intervention study by Ialongo, Poduska, Wethamer and Kellam (2001) offered behavioural support in the form of a '**Good Behaviour Game**' (see Figure 1) where explicit behavioural rules were to be followed in order to win prizes (see Donaldson et al., 2011), and this behavioural support was combined with an enhanced literacy and mathematics curriculum. A second experimental group in this study received a broader intervention involving family-school partnerships. Both treatments showed positive effects, but the combination of behavioural and academic support was more effective than the family-school partnership treatment in improving reading and maths, and also resulted in lower levels of conduct problems. In a follow-up study, the treatment that involved a combination of behavioural and academic support showed stronger long-term effects in terms of students graduating from high school and attending college (Bradshaw et al., 2009).

Even adolescents who have been permanently excluded from schools have been shown to respond well to support programs that give them successful *learning* experiences, such as attaining the skills required to gain a power boat driving certificate (Kinder, Howsey, Moore & White, 2000).

Further evidence of the relationship between behaviour disorders and academic difficulties comes from several studies showing that simply adjusting the difficulty level of reading tasks produces lower rates of disruptive behaviour (e.g. Jorgeson, 1977; Haydon, 2012).

Even adolescents who have been permanently excluded from schools ... respond well to support programs that give them successful learning experiences

Even though teachers may feel that behaviour disturbances come from the home background rather than the school, this may not be the whole story. Poor behaviour may be a way of escaping a learning task that the student knows is too difficult. If as teachers we focus just on the negative behaviour, we are at risk of producing a student who is compliant, but who still fails academically. If we focus on both behaviour and academics, however, we have a chance of producing a well-behaved successful student. It is essential for schools to focus on ensuring that students with behaviour problems make good academic progress.

... simply adjusting the difficulty level of tasks produces lower rates of disruptive behaviour

For a student like James, if he could be helped at an early stage to feel competent rather than "dumb" for example, by teaching him explicit skills of phonemic awareness, the alphabet, and how to read and make words using phonics (e.g., Castle, Riach & Nicholson, 1994) he could well have many more chances open to him as he grows up.

Note:

This article is based on a chapter Tom Nicholson wrote for the Garner et al. (2014) SAGE *Handbook of emotional and behavioral difficulties* (2nd ed., pp. 177-188). SAGE.

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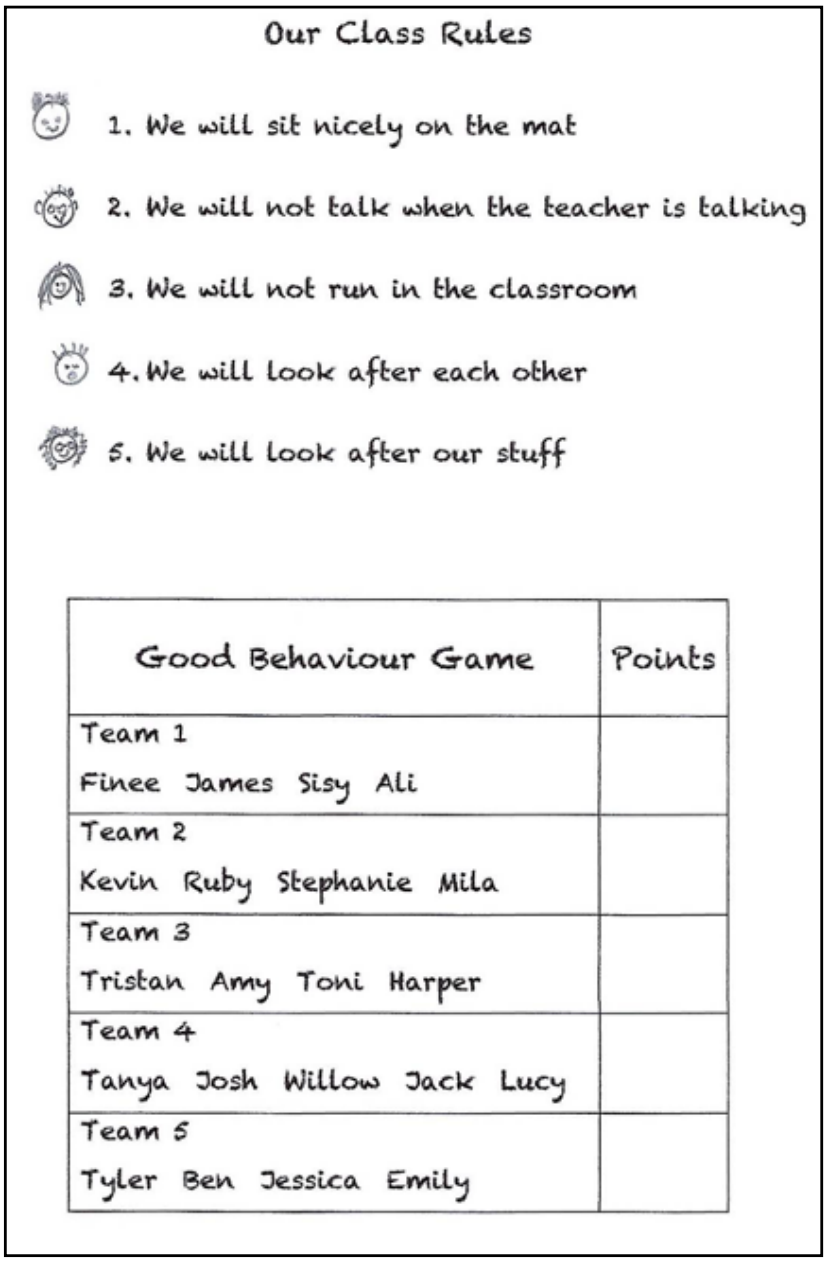

Figure 1: Good Behaviour Game.

The teacher and class make up the rules of the game. They divide the class into teams. They set a cut-off score that will win the game, e.g., a score of less than 4. The teacher writes on the class whiteboard a penalty of one mark for anyone who breaks the rules. At the end of the day the team with the best score below the cut-off wins the reward, e.g., stickers, stars, early mark for playtime, pieces of fruit, and so on.

Poor reading, poor self-concept, and anxiety: A review of the evidence and some practical advice

Deanna Francis and **Genevieve McArthur**, based at Macquarie University Centre for Reading, provide an insight into some of the work being done by an international research team on emotional health problems in poor readers. This article contributes an overview of their extensive survey of the research literature, providing a brief summary of the research findings regarding the links between reading difficulties, self-concept and anxiety. They provide some follow-up suggestions for classrooms and clinicians regarding practical directions that the research points to.

Poor reading and emotional health

Over the years, various clinicians, educators, and reading researchers have raised concerns about the emotional health of children who struggle with reading. These concerns are validated by qualitative interview studies of individual children with poor reading (e.g., Boyes, Leitao, Claessen, Badcock, & Nayton, 2016; Riddick, 1996), as well as quantitative group studies that have compared emotional health in poor readers and typical readers (Francis et al., 2019). At the same time, these concerns are queried by studies that have not found emotional problems in poor readers (e.g., Miller, Hynd, & Miller, 2005).

The goal of our research collaborative, which reaches across Australia (NSW and WA) and the world (Australia, Finland, and the UK), is to make sense of the apparently complex relationship between poor reading and emotional health. To this end, the goal of this article is to provide a summary of our recent systematic review and meta-analysis of the evidence for an association between poor reading and one emotional health problem: poor self-concept (McArthur, Filardi, Francis, Boyes, & Badcock, 2020). This manuscript has been published in an open-access journal called PeerJ, and can be accessed for free: *https://peerj.com/articles/8772/*.

Poor reading and self-concept

Self-concept broadly refers to an individual's belief about themselves,

which is developed through experience and interactions with their environment (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). Self-concept can be divided into different domains of life, such as academia, school, work, home, social life, and physical appearance (Harter, Whitesell, & Junkin, 1998). Therefore, our systematic review and meta-analysis had three aims: first, to determine if there was a statistically reliable association between poor reading and poor self-concept overall; second to measure the strength of this association; and third to explore if this association was influenced by factors such as the domain of poor self-concept, or by other factors such as type of poor reading, age, gender, reading instruction, or school environment.

For readers interested in the finer details, this review included studies that met a number of criteria. Study participants had to be English readers and speakers whose word reading accuracy or fluency was either one grade, one year, or one standard deviation below the mean level. In addition, self-concept had to be measured using a standardised and normed test that was administered directly to the participant. The primary outcome of the review was 'average self-concept', which was the mean score

of all the self-concept tests administered in the study. A secondary outcome was the different domains of self-concept, including reading-writing-spelling, academia, mathematics, behaviour, physical appearance, school, work, home, social, and athletics.

Of the 3000+ studies identified in our searches, only 13 fulfilled these criteria. We were surprised by this, since the criteria were by no means stringent from a scientific point of view.

The goal of our research collaborative … is to make sense of the apparently complex relationship between poor reading and emotional health.

Meta-analyses of these studies suggested that the relationship between poor reading and average self-concept was both reliable and moderately strong (please see the publication for statistical details *https://peerj.com/articles/8772/*). In addition, it is possible that there are moderate-to-strong associations between poor reading and reading-writing-spelling, academic, and mathematic self-concept domains. However, more studies are needed to determine if these latter associations are reliable.

Implications for theory

The findings of this systematic review suggest that there is a moderately strong association between poor reading and self-concept. Furthermore, there is some preliminary evidence that poor reading is associated with the self-concept domains that are most directly related to reading and academic performance.

It is interesting to note that these findings may shed some light on why, in a separate systematic review (Francis, Caruana, Hudson, & McArthur, 2019), we have also found a moderate and reliable association between poor reading and anxiety. It may be the case that children with poor reading, who often experience reading failure in the classroom (Riddick, Sterling, Farmer, & Morgan, 1999), are at risk of forming the self-perception that they are 'bad readers' (Chapman, Tunmer, & Prochnow, 2001). This may heighten their fear of criticism from classmates and teachers, leading to anxiety. Their need to avoid such criticism – whether real or perceived - may distract them from classroom instruction, including reading lessons. They may then fall even further behind in their reading, which may heighten their poor self-concept and their anxiety. This negative spiral of events has yet to be tested in a proper trial, and so it currently stands as a hypothesis that requires further empirical investigation.

Implications for classrooms

Despite our recent findings, we have a long way to go to fully understand the association between poor reading, poor self-concept, and anxiety. This makes it hard to provide evidence-based suggestions for teachers. We therefore offer the following suggestions with due caution. If a teacher suspects that a child is struggling with reading and self-concept or anxiety, they may consider speaking to the child's carers to see if they have noticed the same issues outside of school. This conversation may provide an opportunity to discuss referrals to specialists in both emotional health and reading. An ideal specialist for emotional health would be a clinical psychologist with expertise in child development, who could provide advice on how to increase self-concept and decrease anxiety in and out of school. An ideal specialist for reading would be a professional who could provide a detailed assessment of all the components of reading. This assessment would reveal which aspects of a child's reading needs extra support. Equipped with greater knowledge about a child's individual reading and emotional needs, a teacher may be able to identify where to focus their support for the child in the classroom.

Implications for clinical practice

As mentioned above, children with concurrent reading and emotional problems need detailed assessments of reading, self-concept, and anxiety to identify their individual needs. We have research under review suggesting that the reading assessment should include tests of reading accuracy (for letter-sound rules, nonword reading, irregular word reading), reading fluency (for words and texts), and reading comprehension. The self-concept assessment should include self-report questions for reading self-concept, general self-concept, academic self-concept, and social self-concept; and the anxiety assessment should assess for social anxiety and generalised anxiety, as well as separation anxiety and specific phobias (email *deanna.francis@mq.edu.au* for details). Some of these assessments – notably for reading and reading self-concept – can be accessed for free from MOTIf (*https://www.motif.org.au*). MOTif is hosted by the Macquarie University (MQ) Centre for Reading (*mq.edu.au/research/MQCR*) and the MQ Reading Clinic (*mq.edu.au/reading-clinic*) – both not-for-profit groups of reading scientists who provide independent support for reading difficulties.

… our systematic review confirms that the links between reading difficulties and emotional health difficulties are very real, and we are very aware of the difficult task faced by clinicians and educators who are asked to provide these young people with support.

The outcomes of these comprehensive assessments for reading, self-concept, and anxiety can be used to design a program that integrates reading and anxiety intervention. If a clinician feels that they need some help with this, there are two sources of support. For children with concomitant problems with reading and anxiety, please contact us here at Macquarie University for a PRAX (poor reading + anxiety) intervention schema, which is currently under scientific review (email *deanna.francis@mq.edu.au*). For children with concomitant problems with reading and self-concept, our colleagues from Curtin University and Dyslexia SPELD WA have developed an afterschool program called "Clever Kids" (Boyes, Leitao, Claessen, Dzidic, Badcock, & Nayton, 2016. Also see Boyes et al. article in this issue of the LDA bulletin). This too is currently under scientific review, but the team can be contacted for details via *mark.boyes@curtin.edu.au* or *https://dsf.net.au/contact*.

In sum, our systematic review confirms that the links between reading difficulties and emotional health difficulties are very real, and we are very aware of the difficult task faced

by clinicians and educators who are asked to provide these young people with support. It is our hope that the recommendations in this article, and the resources that we provide, can help these people in some way.

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Does reading anxiety impact on academic achievement at university?

If students with reading difficulties do manage to reach university, are their struggles to cope compounded by reading anxiety? **Sophia Soares** and **Nic Badcock** discuss the results of Sophia's Honours thesis, submitted to the School of Psychological Science at the University of Western Australia, examining the relationship between reading anxiety and the variables of reading history, reading comprehension, and academic grades in a sample of university students. There seems to be a pattern of some encouraging results.

Reading is an essential skill for all individuals, and it can be a difficult task for some. Difficulty with reading has a serious impact for university students, because at the level of higher education the majority of information and knowledge is gained through reading. A recent study of university students found that those with a history of reading difficulties had lower academic achievement than those without a history of reading difficulties (Bergey et al., 2017). In the absence of a diagnosed learning disability, these students often fly under the radar of support services, are more likely to withdraw from their first year of study, and are at higher risk of not completing their degree (Richardson & Wydell, 2003). Gaining a better understanding of the reasons for students' reading difficulties could help guide new approaches to support.

The difficulties encountered by university students often involve poor reading fluency (accuracy and speed of reading) and low reading comprehension. At the tertiary level, students are required to understand very complex and difficult texts. The academic workload takes a particularly large toll on students who find reading slow and effortful. Some poor readers put in a huge amount of effort and many hours to achieve their academic goals, with some students spending up to three times as long on basic revision tasks (MacCullagh et al., 2017).

Beyond the factors of reading ability and academic workload, however, there is another – often invisible – variable that impacts on university students who are poor readers: anxiety. This article reports on a study conducted in the School of Psychological Science at the University of Western Australia, in which we examined the impact of reading anxiety on the relationship between reading ability and academic achievement at university.

What is reading anxiety?

When students struggle with reading, school and university can include unpleasant experiences. Negative experiences can start in school, where children may fear being judged and ridiculed about their reading. This is likely to lead to poor readers reporting higher levels of emotional problems like general anxiety (Meer et al., 2016), and experiencing higher levels of anxiety when reading aloud.

The term 'reading anxiety' refers to an unpleasant emotional response to reading, as well as apprehension to

situations involving reading (Ramirez et al, 2019.) Compared with general anxiety, specific reading anxiety has a stronger negative correlation with primary school students' reading, math, and spelling grades (Zbornik & Wallbrown, 1991).

It has been argued that reading anxiety and poor reading have a two-way relationship. That is, reading anxiety may both cause and result from, poor reading (Piccolo et al., 2017; Ramirez et al., 2019). In this way, reading anxiety can be viewed as part of a vicious cycle, in which poor reading abilities cause anxiety. This promotes avoidance behaviours and less practice of reading, preventing improvement, which results in the student viewing learning to read as an ongoing failure, ultimately leading to more anxiety (Bradley & Thalgott, 1987).

Academic achievement and anxiety

Whilst moderate levels of general anxiety can be advantageous to academic performance (Al-Qaisy, 2011), higher levels of anxiety are associated with poorer academic achievement (El-Anzi, 2005). In the case of specific reading anxiety, there are multiple routes through which reading anxiety could impact on academic achievement at university. The relationship between reading ability and reading anxiety tends to increase avoidance, manifesting in skipping class, failing to turn-up for oral presentations (Damico et al., 2011), and

potentially leaving university altogether. Reading anxiety is also associated with low motivation to read, further promoting reading avoidance (Zbornik, 2001). Emotions such as anxiety can also impair academic achievement through eliciting task-irrelevant thoughts, and subsequently reducing available cognitive resources typically utilised to complete tasks (Pekrun et al., 2002). Additionally, concentration and retention of information can be reduced by anxiety (Eysenck et al., 2007), and this would in turn potentially impact on academic achievement.

The present study: anxiety, reading ability, and academic achievement

In our study, we explored whether reading anxiety made a difference to the relationship between reading ability and academic achievement. We asked whether the presence of reading anxiety further decreased the academic achievement of poor readers. If this connection was supported, it would suggest that interventions targeting reading anxiety may help individuals to realise their potential at university, independent of their reading ability.

In order to explore this relationship, we recruited current undergraduate and postgraduate students from the University of Western Australia (UWA), using 'SONA', UWA's research-participation system. Those who volunteered reflected a broad range of reading abilities – no special selection for reading difficulties was used. Eighty-eight participants completed a series of online questionnaires measuring reading anxiety, general anxiety, reading history, and reading comprehension.

Reading anxiety was measured using the Macquarie Oxford Reading Anxiety Test: Adult version (Francis et al., unpublished). This test includes questions like: "I feel afraid if I have to read aloud in front of people" and is answered on a 4-point scale: 'Never' through to 'Always'. General anxiety was measured using the Trait Anxiety Scale (Spielberger et al., 1983), with general questions like: "I feel nervous and restless" answered on a 4-point scale: 'Almost Never' through to 'Almost Always'. Measuring general anxiety allowed us to establish that reading anxiety was a specific subtype of anxiety.

Students' reading history was measured using the Adult Reading History Questionnaire – Revised (ARHQ-R) (Parilla et al, 2003), which taps into past and current attitudes and experiences with education and reading. Example questions include: "When you were in secondary school, how many books did you read for pleasure?" answered on a five-point scale: 'None' through to 'More than 10'; and "Did you have difficulty remembering complex verbal instructions in secondary school?" 'No' through to 'A great deal'.

Reading comprehension was measured using the Reading Comprehension Test from the York Adult Assessment Battery – Revised (YAA-R) (Warmington et al., 2013). In this test, students read a passage of text (one page of approximately 500 words) at their own pace and then answer a series of questions about the text by typing their answers.

University grades were used as an estimate of the participants' academic achievement. Specifically, participants' Weighted Average Mark (WAM) was used, which is an average percentage mark for all the academic units students had completed in their course thus far.

Findings

There were three main findings in our study:

1. Poor reading comprehension and a history of reading difficulties were related to lower grades;
2. Poor reading comprehension and a history of reading difficulties were related to higher reported reading anxiety; and
3. The relationship between reading comprehension plus reading history and grades was not affected by reading anxiety.

Implications

Current poor reading comprehension, especially when combined with a history of reading difficulties, was associated with lower academic grades at university. This is consistent with previous findings linking reading comprehension with academic success. A history of reading difficulties alone was not, however, associated with poorer grades. This is contrary to previous findings suggesting students with a history of reading difficulties had lower academic achievement (Bergey et al., 2017). It is possible that the accommodations universities currently provide to students with a history of reading difficulties (e.g. extra examination time) make a positive difference to academic grades, even if reading difficulties are not remediated. Therefore, we do recommend that students with a known history of reading difficulties seek special consideration during their studies.

Although reading anxiety did not make an independent contribution to academic grades in this study, reading anxiety was widely reported within our sample - and, as such, it remains an emotional well-being issue to be considered in its own right. Interestingly, reading anxiety was not associated with current reading comprehension problems, but was associated with having a past history of reading

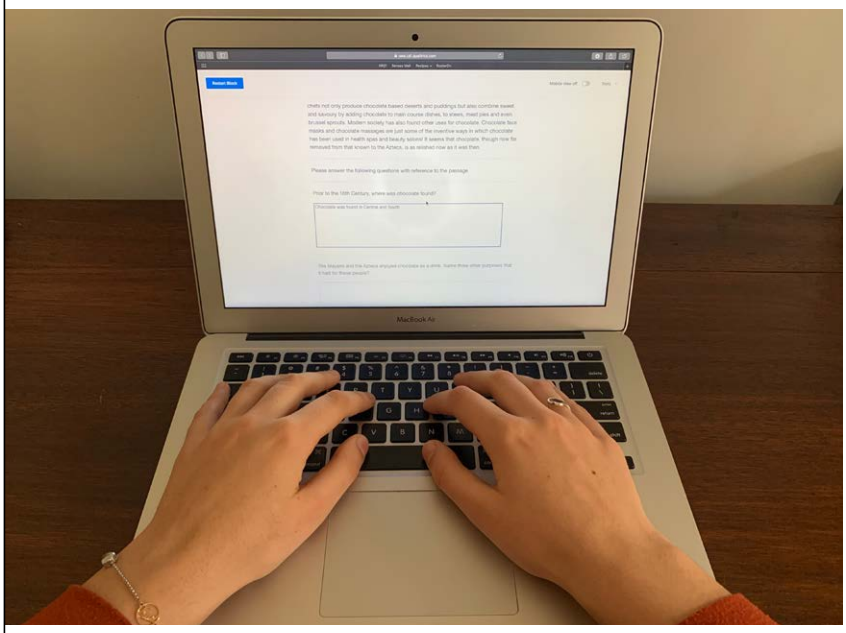

Figure 1: University student completing the online assessment

difficulties. This pattern could be followed up via interview and in-person reading assessments, exploring the degree to which reading anxiety limits the student experience even when academic grades are not affected. That is, reading anxiety may have a bigger influence on drop-out or application rates than reading difficulties themselves.

One further consideration for interpreting the findings of this study is that it was conducted in Semester 1 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, students were given an option of an 'ungraded pass'. This meant that, if students felt their grades for a particular unit were unduly affected by COVID, they could opt for an 'ungraded pass' and this result would not contribute to their overall WAM. This may have reduced the typical range of grades. Therefore, it will be important to rerun this study during a more typical semester.

The Take-Home Message

In this study we explored whether the relationship between reading ability and academic achievement was impacted by levels of reading anxiety, hypothesising that the presence of reading anxiety would further decrease the academic achievement of poor readers. This hypothesis was not supported, and the current findings suggest that reading anxiety does not affect academic achievement at the university level. This is a useful, and potentially comforting, message to convey to poor readers.

University should be equally attainable for all individuals who wish to participate, regardless of their abilities or learning differences. Our findings suggest that poor readers are not only struggling academically at university, but they are also vulnerable to experiencing anxiety. It is vital that we explore and try to address these factors which could be limiting students' capabilities.

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Managing challenging behaviour in the classroom: Positive Teaching and Function-Based approaches

It is a constant challenge for teachers to develop their own skills in managing difficult behaviour in the classroom. **Micaela Rafferty** and **Jill Hellemans** are new members of the MultiLit team, and are currently designing a set of workshops based on a a positive behaviour support approach to classroom behaviour management. For this article Micaela and Jill explain the theoretical context of their work, and provide a set of very constructive explicit suggestions about how teachers can monitor their own patterns of responding, taking care to understand the reasons for the behaviour and teaching replacement behaviours – hopefully humming "accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative" quietly to themselves as they work …

Introduction

Managing challenging behaviour in the classroom remains one of the biggest struggles for teachers. As classrooms become more inclusive, the learning and behavioural needs of the classroom become more diverse. Now, more than ever, teachers need to be equipped with effective, practical and evidence-based practices for classroom behaviour management. The key to developing schools as effective learning environments is strongly linked to school cultures that promote positive social behaviour and academic engagement (Sugai & Horner, 2008). For students with learning difficulties, the implementation of positive and proactive supports is critical to help them succeed both academically and behaviourally.

Children with learning difficulties can present with additional and significant social, emotional and behavioural concerns (Allday, 2018). It is important to consider not only the academic struggles that students with learning difficulties face but also the potential adaptive skill deficits that may contribute to their learning and behavioural profile. They may engage in challenging behaviour, unintentionally or purposefully, in order to disguise or mask their difficulties, to avoid tasks that they find challenging, or simply because they don't possess the more appropriate, alternative behaviour required for that situation. A school environment that is rich with Positive Teaching practices and incorporates a school-wide commitment to function-based approaches ensures the focus is on figuring out why a student is behaving in a certain way and aims

to teach the student alternative skills as a positive and proactive approach to behaviour change.

It is important to note that Positive Teaching and function-based approaches take a non-categorical stance. That is, the science of behaviour and learning applies to all students and does not denote a special set of principles based on diagnoses. This article, however, aims to provide context around the importance of these approaches for students with learning difficulties in order to create classrooms with clear expectations in which they can be successful.

Behaviour support practices within the school context

When supporting students' behaviour within a school context a school-wide, Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) model is often considered best practice (Dunlap et al., 2008). PBS is a practical approach for decreasing challenging behaviour and improving quality of life. The approach involves data-based assessment and empirically validated strategies. It is worth noting that PBS is derived primarily from the science of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA). ABA is a systematic

approach to the assessment and evaluation of behaviours and offers robust principles of behaviour and learning. ABA is the conceptual foundation that provides the fundamental framework for PBS. PBS adopts a *systems* approach and supports a school-wide roll out of these empirically validated principles and procedures. It focuses on the implementation of evidence-based practices within a unique social context. Contemporary applications of PBS in schools incorporate integrated, schoolwide efforts to prevent problems and improve all students' behaviour and learning.

It is important to consider not only the academic struggles that students with learning difficulties face but also the potential adaptive skill deficits that may contribute to their learning and behavioural profile.

Response to Intervention (RtI) is an additional, contemporary framework used in schools for identifying those students who may need additional support, both academically and behaviourally. RtI provides a multi-tiered model of intervention that focuses on screening and early detection, progress monitoring, intervention delivery, and data-driven decision-making across 3 tiers. When Tier 1 universal, preventative procedures (such as Positive Teaching, effective instruction and proactive classroom management) are implemented effectively, the resources and capacity of teachers to provide more specialised interventions to individual students are improved (Sugai & Horner, 2008).

There is emerging recognition in the education sector that a function-based approach to behaviour change is recommended. Functional behaviour assessment (FBA) is a systematic, evidence-based process that involves gathering data to identify and define target behaviour, the purpose (or function) of the behaviour in a given context, and what factors maintain the behaviour that is interfering with learning. Furthermore, and possibly most critically, this process enables the design of interventions that are functionally related to the challenging behaviour (i.e. an intervention that targets specifically why the behaviour is occurring).

Teacher training tends to focus on how to assess academic difficulties but fails to provide training on how to systematically assess challenging behaviour (Young et al., 2018). Lack of training in a function-based approach to behaviour management often leads teachers down a slippery path toward the overuse of reactive and aversive strategies. In addition, without understanding or identifying the function of the problem behaviour, teachers are more likely to inadvertently reinforce and strengthen problem behaviour. FBA is a method that can help all teachers avoid this problematic cycle and instead develop and implement appropriate interventions (Moreno & Bullock, 2011).

Positive Teaching

Our first port of call when it comes to implementing school-wide, function-based interventions at the Tier 1 whole class level, is Positive Teaching (Wheldall & Merrett, 1984; Wheldall et al., 2020.). By Positive Teaching we are referring to the behavioural approach to teaching based on applied behaviour analysis.

Positive Teaching is defined by five principles as follows:

1. Teaching is concerned with the observable
2. Almost all classroom behaviour is learned
3. Learning involves change in behaviour
4. Behaviour changes as a result of its consequences
5. Behaviours are influenced by classroom contexts

Essentially, Positive Teaching subscribes to the old maxim and song "accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative." While not totally eliminating the negative, Positive Teaching advocates that teachers should drastically reduce their use of reprimands and other punishments and, instead, strive to increase the use of praise statements and other rewards, *contingently*.

Positive Teaching encourages teachers to monitor their own behaviour and recognises that for student behaviour to change, teachers must first change their own behaviour. It focuses on implementation of the following:

- Recognising and reinforcing appropriate behaviour through the effective use of explicit, positive praise
- Improving the quality and frequency of praise
- Using reprimands sparingly and making them more effective
- Careful arrangement of the classroom (e.g. layout & seating arrangements)
- Establishing clear and effective classroom rules
- Pairing reinforcement with following classroom rules

Positive Teaching provides a vehicle for teachers to implement universal, effective support benefiting the majority of students in the class. Only once consistent and effective implementation of these Tier 1 strategies are in place will teachers have the time and capacity to delve into more focused assessment and intervention of behaviour as described below in this article (Merrett & Wheldall, 1993; O'Neil & Stephenson, 2013; Wheldall et al., 2020.)

Function-based thinking

Function-based thinking is a model of ***thinking*** about behaviour that incorporates a systematic process for defining challenging behaviour, determining behavioural function and selecting interventions to match the function of the behaviour (Hershfeldt et al., 2020). Function-based thinking takes into consideration the setting demands on educators and simplifies the comprehensive functional behaviour assessment process. Of course, the ideal is that teachers get training in functional behaviour assessment, but this takes time, resources and training in the complexities of such a technical process. Function-based thinking does not replace functional behaviour assessment, however. It is meant to enhance teacher knowledge about functions and designing effective interventions.

… the science of behaviour and learning applies to all students and does not denote a special set of principles based on diagnoses.

Allday (2018) acknowledges that teachers supporting children with challenging behaviour are often

uncertain of where to start. Teachers may feel unqualified to manage all of the potential variables involved when a child displays challenging behaviour. This uncertainty can often lead to inaction, and inaction leads to maintenance and often increases in behaviour. Given the complexities and many variables that can be associated with students with learning difficulties, function-based approaches move teachers away from diagnosis, blaming, and getting bogged down in what they can't control. Instead, it creates a shift in perspective leading teachers to look for simpler explanations as to why a behaviour is occurring, assist them to look to the environment that they can control (i.e. the classroom) and apply a more systematic approach to problem solving why a student might be behaving in a certain way (Hershfeldt, et al., 2010).

Allday (2018) breaks the functional thinking approach into three broad levels:

Thinking Level 1: Maintaining Function

This initial level of functional thinking helps teachers to look at 'the why' behind a student's behaviour. It encourages teachers to observe, take data, and look for patterns. Ultimately, this level of thinking results in teachers being able to determine if the student's behaviour is being maintained by positive reinforcement (i.e. gaining access to something desirable such as peer or teacher attention, preferred activities or preferred locations) or by negative reinforcement (i.e. avoiding or escaping something undesirable such as reading aloud, completing a maths worksheet or waiting in line).

Thinking Level 2: Deficits

The second level of functional thinking has teachers assess the potential skill or behavioural deficits that may be contributing to the challenging behaviour. Students engaging in challenging behaviour may lack academic skills to complete certain tasks successfully but may also lack the functional everyday skills, or adaptive behaviours, required to be successful. For example, a student that rips up the maths worksheet may do this to avoid a difficult or less-preferred task (function) but may also lack an appropriate way to ask for help (skill deficit). Furthermore, teachers are also taught to assess if this 'missing' skill is due to a performance deficit (i.e. the student does have a more appropriate skill in their repertoire but chooses not to use it), or a skill deficit (i.e. the student does not possess this skill at all and needs to learn it).

Thinking Level 3: Intervention

Once teachers have determined the potential function of the student's challenging behaviour and any skill or behavioural deficits at play, then the third level of functional thinking can be implemented. This involves selecting an intervention that matches the function of the behaviour and takes into account any skill deficits. This step is crucial, as interventions that are designed with the function in mind have been shown to be more effective at improving challenging behaviour (Ingram et al., 2005). In addition, teachers can match the teaching procedures more effectively once they have determined the type of deficit involved. For performance deficits, the student requires motivation and specially designed reinforcement contingencies to perform the desired behaviour. However, a skill deficit requires explicit and direct instruction to teach the new skill and increased opportunities for the student to respond and practice.

The importance of teaching replacement behaviour

As described above, designing interventions often involves teaching the student more appropriate and functionally equivalent behaviours to replace the behaviour of concern. This is a critical element to achieve effective and lasting behaviour change (McKenna et al., 2016). Within the school context, the selection of these skills may be a combination of specific academic skills, broad learning behaviours (such as task completion, following instructions, and staying seated during desk work), functional communication skills (such as requesting help or a break) and social skills (including waiting for a turn, working in a group and initiating interactions appropriately). In order to achieve effective behaviour change, curriculum modification, systematic teaching of discrete skills and creating increased opportunities for practice are required. For students with learning difficulties, a collaborative approach involving allied health professionals and specifically programming for generalisation of these skills into a group or class context are recommended additional supports. It is critically important to support and develop the adaptive behaviour of students displaying challenging behaviour, just as much as supporting academic skills, in order to achieve effective and lasting behaviour change.

Conclusion

Strong classroom behaviour management skills are essential to creating positive, safe and productive learning environments. Teachers can become agents for meaningful and lasting behaviour change in their classrooms by adopting the principles of Positive Teaching and looking into the function behind a student's challenging behaviour. For students with learning difficulties, who can present with considerable learning and behavioural needs, a function-informed approach to behaviour management that emphasises teaching new, more appropriate skills is the most effective way to help them succeed in the classroom.

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Micaela Rafferty and Jill Hellemans are both Board Certified Behaviour Analysts and Special Educators, each with over 16 years' experience in early intervention and school-aged intervention. Together they have extensive experience in the assessment and treatment of challenging behaviour, development and monitoring of behaviour intervention plans, curriculum modification, literacy assessment and intervention, functional communication training and social skills instruction. They have both spent many years working in partnership with schools and teachers to implement school-wide behaviour management practices as well as individualised support plans. Micaela and Jill have joined MultiLit to further develop professional development workshops for teachers and expand services under its Positive Teaching and Learning Initiative.

Disclosure

Micaela Rafferty and Jill Hellemans are employees of MultiLit Pty Ltd. They are directly involved in the creation, delivery and promotion of MultiLit's suite of professional development products available to teachers for classroom behaviour management, including the approaches outlined in this article.

Book review
Positive Teaching for Australian Primary Schools: Effective classroom behaviour management.

Reviewed by **Jessica McLaren**

Kevin Wheldall, Robyn Wheldall & Frank Merrett, 2020. Positive Teaching for Australian Primary Schools: Effective classroom behaviour management. Published by MultiLit Positive Teaching and Learning.

Most teachers at some point in their career ask themselves: "What are the secrets to effective classroom behaviour management?"

The authors of *Positive Teaching for Australian Primary Schools* challenge teachers to reflect on their own teaching practice as a primary means of changing their student's behaviours. Wheldall et al. present their research findings into effective classroom behaviour management, and they discuss how to change classroom behaviour through intentionally changing teaching practices and the classroom environment.

For the past 40 years the authors have researched, written and taught about the Positive Teaching approach and supporting practices. They argue that by implementing Positive Teaching Strategies, primary school teachers can create learning environments that foster effective teaching and learning, while decreasing stressors that inevitably impact on teaching outcomes.

Positive teaching practices, in general, are based on the principle that student behaviour is largely learned as a consequence of interacting with their environment in the classroom. According to the authors, Positive Teaching involves considering a simple ABC pattern:

- A refers to the *antecedents* to the problem behaviours.
- B refers to *behaviour* or what the student is doing that is disrupting learning.
- C refers to the *consequences* that result from the student engaging in the troublesome behaviours.

The Positive Teaching principles are summarised in five basic points:

1. Teaching should only be concerned with what can be observed.
2. Majority of classroom behaviour (good and bad) is learned.
3. Learning involves changing behaviour.
4. Student behaviour changes as a result of its consequences.
5. Students behaviour is influenced by classroom context.

This book provides a clear, concise and accessible framework through which teachers can reflect on their own classroom behaviour. The authors provide guidance to teachers on how to observe and identify what they may be able to change, and then provide a discussion of evidence-based strategies that create a classroom environment that can facilitate effective and efficient learning.

The authors' studies of classroom behaviour conclude that the most common distressing behaviours are relatively minor. That is, the behaviours that teachers frequently report as being the most disruptive are talking out of turn and hindering other children. The good news is on balance, the authors have found that primary school students are on task 80% of the time. Interestingly, the author's studies show that what teachers typically praise and provide positive reinforcement for is *academic* work. Positive *behaviours* of students in the classroom, on the other hand, are not reinforced at the same rate. Addressing this balance is at the heart of Positive Teaching practices.

For this reviewer, effective behaviour management is the thing we aspire to and want to facilitate, and yet it can be quite elusive. As classroom teachers we are all too aware troublesome student behaviour has negative impacts on the academic outcomes of not just the student in question but also all learners in the classroom. Teachers are also aware that negative academic outcomes may lead to troublesome student behaviour. We need to work on both sides of this classroom issue.

This book provides valuable, evidence-based insights into the interactions that take place between teacher, student and the classroom environment. The authors do not set out to provide an easy or quick fix. While ABC appears simple on the surface, it may not always be that easy when it comes to consistently practicing the principles. But then again, nothing worthwhile is straightforward at first.

The authors encourage teachers at all stages of their career to be brave and begin or continue their journey from "unconscious incompetence" to "conscious competence."

In my opinion this book is compact, practical, very readable, and would be a valuable resource for any teacher or school's (K-12) Professional Learning Library.

Jessica McLaren's qualifications include a Diploma of Teaching, a Master of Education and a Graduate Diploma in Communication Disorders. She is currently working as a Special Education teacher.

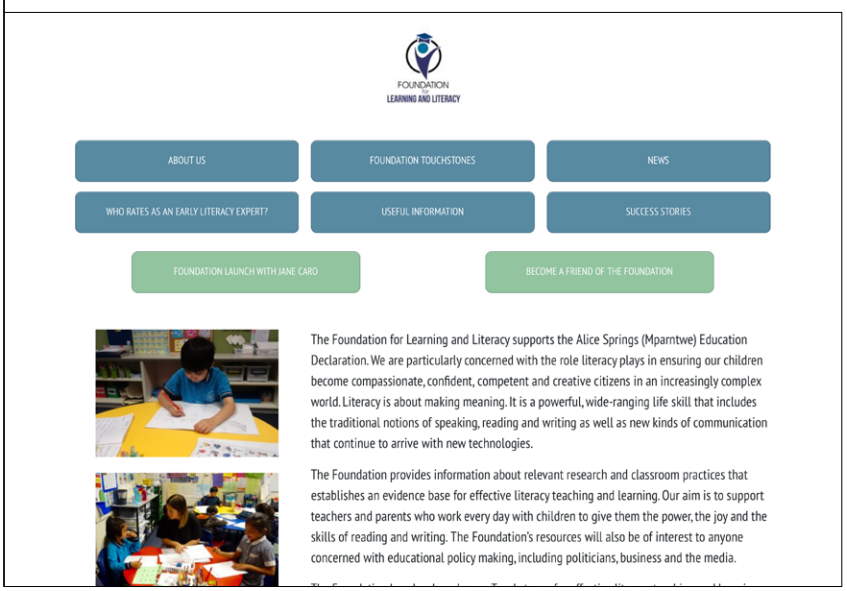
Website review
Shaky Foundations: A review of the Foundations for Learning and Literacy

Reid Smith provides a review of a recently launched resource website, Foundation for Learning and Literacy: foundation forlearningandliteracy.info/

The *Foundation for Learning and Literacy* launched its website in August 2020 with a video production featuring Jane Caro in conversation with Foundation Co-chairs Jo Padgham and Robyn Ewing. The broad goals of the Foundation are admirable. Reading is one of the joys of life, and the ultimate goal of reading is to make meaning of the text. All educators would agree that all children should leave school knowing how to read and write. Padgham and Ewing say they understand the need to close the research-to-practice gap and help teachers learn more about the teaching of reading and writing, as professional learning is a key component in achieving the goal of universal literacy. The Foundation is presented as an organisation which provides easy access to research evidence in plain language and exemplars of evidence-based practice to teachers, parents and policy makers. However, the launch, and the accompanying website, leads me to question how it will operate as a portal for evidence-based practice.

The Foundation positions itself as an organisation committed to evidence-based practice, frequently making reference to the various experts that are members of the group. Both the launch video and the associated website dedicate significant time and space to describing what the Foundation believes constitutes a 'literacy expert'. The defining feature of 'expertise', it can be argued, is that it is only as current as the latest research. As practitioners, researchers, and policy makers, we all need to be open to new learning and new research, even if it is challenging to our current beliefs and practices. A problematic indicator of the Foundation's openness to new evidence is the presence of the 'Touchstones', 11 principles upon which the Foundation is based. It was not clear from the launch video what role the 'Touchstones' had in guiding the organisation; however, viewing the resources curated for educators on the Foundation website provided some clarity. The Touchstones, being more and less specific, are intended to guide the Foundation's selection of endorsed practices. This is an odd way to evaluate evidence – the use of pre-existing, seemingly immovable tenets by its nature (and probably purpose), constrains what can be included. Their use opens the potential for uncritical rejection of evidence based on the fact that it does not fit with one or more of the 'Touchstones', no matter its demonstrable efficacy in helping children to read.

Given the stated mission of the Foundation to provide information about relevant research and classroom practices that establish an evidence base for effective literacy teaching and learning, it would be expected that the launch would focus heavily on the question of *"What are the most effective approaches to teaching reading?"* Those who would be looking to the Foundation for guidance and support need this question answered,



particularly for those children for whom the current methods of instruction are not working. Rather curiously, however, the speakers in the launch decide to spend little time discussing evidence and associated practices, and instead proceeded to frame some of the issues in reading instruction in a problematic way. It is difficult to see how the negative description of the many teachers using particular "lock-step" (read: systematic) practices as "Gradgrinds" could possibly be seen as supportive or positive. Gradgrind, the cruel and utilitarian teacher of Dickens' *Hard Times*, is a world away from any early reading teacher I have met. As a teacher, I wonder how this characterisation furthers the public discourse about the teaching of reading and what evidence would exist to support it.

Like many schools, my own school, Ballarat Clarendon College, looks to research for reading practices that will be most effective for the children in our care and is always open to further avenues for accessing that information. In developing the Early Reading Plan for the school, Clarendon College explored various approaches in order to make selections of what would likely be most effective in enabling all children to experience the joy of reading independently. The evidence for reading instruction clearly highlighted the importance of using a systematic synthetic phonics approach alongside a knowledge- and literature-rich curriculum for our youngest children. It is deeply troubling that the evidence base Clarendon College used to develop its reading instruction is at odds with the advice offered in resources provided on the Foundation website. The presence of numerous articles on their website professing an opposition to a systematic approach to learning, particularly phonics, reflects a divergence from the general scientific evidence base. We know that one of the most important factors for successful learning is what the students already know and are able to do, which highlights the importance of a carefully planned and sequenced curriculum.

Implementation of a structured and systematic phonics program is not Gradgrindian. Rather, it is an efficient, engaging, and fast-moving 'way in' to the world of written text, led by teachers with high levels of linguistics knowledge about the English language, and its phonology and orthography. Accordingly, it should be a crucial component of every effective reading teacher's practice. The efficacy of the structured and explicit phonics approach has been proven across multiple studies and contexts; of all the instructional models in education, systematic phonics has perhaps the strongest evidence base. We judge the efficacy of this approach through what our students are able to do as a result of it – whether all students can read on level, by the end of Grade 2. For the Foundation to claim that the wide-spread use of methods that are best supported by evidence is 'an assault on professionalism' is both provocative and misguided. Use of evidence-based techniques is actually a hallmark of being a professional, as it is in all professions.

The role of joy in the classroom is prominent in the Foundation launch, with cautions about the adoption of joyless teaching approaches. I have never met a teacher in any school who believes that joy has no place in the classroom. The invocation of joy in this context diverts from the real issue at hand – whether or not children are learning to read. Unlike the Foundation, we do not see that a structured method of learning is incompatible with joy, and I am not aware of any evidence that would support this claim of dichotomy. Using a structured, explicit and supportive approach, our children develop early self-efficacy in their reading and writing, developing confidence in their skills with the expert and patient help of their teachers. Joy is present in both the enactment and the result of the lessons themselves. Few things bring children more pleasure than the ability to independently read and, perhaps even more so, having the understanding that they can improve in any part of their lives with practice and effective instruction. Watching our 5-year olds read decodable texts to their parents, successfully using their phonics skills to read words correctly, and noting their parents' understanding, is to truly witness joy.

After watching the video, and reviewing the associated website, I cannot help reflecting on the real purpose of the Foundation. The members attempt to position themselves as the champions of the teacher and parent, yet many of the positions expressed in the video are a league away from those taken by many teachers. Although the members of the Foundation have expertise in the literacy space, it is fair to say that the views they represent are actually the voices of a longstanding status quo – a status quo that results in almost 40% of 15-year-old children in our country reading at a level that PISA describes as "below proficient". Many colleagues in secondary schools despair about the difficulties they face trying to teach the secondary curriculum to students who have struggled through primary school, and whose reading, writing and spelling skills are not sufficient to cope with the high school curriculum. There is no joy in a secondary curriculum that makes adolescents feel alienated and anxious because they are unable to read, write and spell.

Rather than the status quo, I believe our children need something different; they need something effective; they need something *not* represented by the *Foundation for Learning and Literacy*. I feel that, rather than following the tired and superseded approaches alluded to at the *Foundation for Literacy Learning* launch, a better investment in time and energy for schools is to follow the advice offered by organisations that aim to change the trajectory of the reading of Australian children.

Reid Smith is Head of Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction at Ballarat Clarendon College, Victoria.

Margot Prior, AM
24 March 1937 – 24 August 2020

In a tribute provided to LDA for this Bulletin, Emeritus Professor Max Coltheart, OA, pays a special personal and professional tribute to Margot Prior. Margot Prior was the recipient of the 2013 LDA Eminent Researcher Award and was also the recipient of the 1996 LDA Mona Tobias Award. She passed away in August this year, and is sorely missed by all members of LDA.

I don't need to provide a eulogy of Margot's wonderful scientific and practical endeavours in the domain of child neuropsychology, because several such eulogies have recently been published to remember her by – see, for example, *https://tributes.theage.com.au/obituaries/140657/professor-margot-prior-ao/*. Instead I will just offer some personal reminiscences of her.

In the 1960s, Margot graduated with Honours in Music from the University of Melbourne, and subsequently had a twenty-year career as a professional musician (an oboist). But at that time she doubted that a career as a musician was sufficiently stable, and so looked around for another possible professional career. As part of her undergraduate career she had completed three years of psychology, so that seemed a promising alternative profession. However, that would need a postgraduate qualification in psychology; an Honours degree in psychology was necessary for admission to graduate study; and she did not have such a degree.

At that time, Monash University was offering Masters (Preliminary) courses which were in effect courses that converted Pass degrees to Honours degrees. So she gained admission to a Masters (Preliminary) degree in Psychology at Monash. This involved a supervised research project; and her supervisor for that project was Malcolm McMillan (known to all as "Mac"). Mac was and is a scholar of psychology who later became particularly well-known for his book *Freud Evaluated: The Completed Arc* (MIT Press: 1991), a monumental scholarly analysis of the historical evolution of Freud's thinking.

At the time Mac and Margot met in the early 1970s, one of Mac's scholarly interests happened to be Leo Kanner and his concept of early infantile autism – work which at that time few knew about. That became the topic of Margot's Masters (Preliminary) research thesis, which became her first publication: Prior and Macmillan (1973) *J of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 3*, 154-167. This was how Margot's lifelong research interest in autism came about.

She went on to do a Masters degree in the Monash Psychology department, and then a PhD there, both on autism. I had been a lecturer in that department and my friendship with Margot began via this Monash connection.

In the early 1980s Margot developed a second major research interest: temperament in childhood. She published numerous significant papers on this topic from 1985 onwards, and she was one of the group who established the Australian Temperament Project, a longitudinal study of the psychosocial development of a large and representative sample of Australian children which began data collection at the end of 1982 and which is still going strong.

Margot's third major research interest was learning to read and dyslexia. This interest stemmed from a sabbatical period in 1982 which she spent with me and my colleagues in the psychology department at Birkbeck College (University of London). There I had established a small and enthusiastic research group of cognitive neuropsychologists, speech pathologists and linguists doing research on acquired and developmental disorders of reading. Margot fitted into this group perfectly and while she was there we completed two detailed single-case studies. One involved a case of acquired dyslexia in a bilingual, biscriptal (English and Nepalese) young man, and the other was one of the earliest studies of developmental surface dyslexia, also in a bilingual person (English and French). We published these studies as papers in the Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology in 1983 and 1984. After her return to La Trobe she continued to work and publish in this area. Her 1996 book *Understanding Specific Learning Difficulties* is still a valuable resource for clinicians, teachers and parents. She and I were commissioned by the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia to write a position paper *Learning to Read in Australia*, which the Academy published as Occasional Paper 1/2007 and was reprinted in the LDA Bulletin. And until quite recently she was an active and valuable contributor to the Developmental Disorders of Language and Literacy (DDOLL) network, an email network which now has 1300 members from many countries who are teachers, parents, practitioners concerned with children's reading difficulties and reading scientists. DDOLL was set up in 2003 with funding from the Australian Research Council, and its aim is to disseminate information about the investigation and treatment of developmental disorders of language and literacy that uses sound scientific methodology and evidence-based research – very much Margot's cup of tea!

VALE Margot Prior

Emeritus Professor Max Coltheart AM was Director of the Macquarie Centre for Cognitive Science and is the administrator of the DDOLL network.

Professor John McLeod
26 February 1925 – 19 August 2020

I want to acknowledge the death of Professor John McLeod in Warman, Saskatchewan, Canada on 19.08.2020. Professor McLeod was a respected scholar in the field of special education and disabilities in Australia, particularly in learning disabilities and intellectual disabilities.

Professor John McLeod was the Deputy-Director of the Remedial Education Centre, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia from 1959 to 1968. As well as leading the staff and directing research projects at the Centre Professor McLeod provided lectures to teachers and principals undertaking post-experience courses in remedial education and in the teaching of children with intellectual disabilities. Professor McLeod also worked with the Centre's staff to assess and to provide remedial intervention to children with learning disabilities in Brisbane and its surroundings. In particular Professor McLeod and the staff of the Centre developed tests to assess children's abilities in reading. During the 1960s and 1970s his well-known tests were distributed throughout Australia. Professor McLeod moved to Saskatchewan, Canada in 1968 where he established training programmes for special education teachers and continued his research into students with disabilities. On 11 October 2002 Professor McLeod was invited to attend the dinner in celebration of 50 years of the Fred and Eleanor Schonell Special Education Research Centre at The University of Queensland and he presented the closing paper at the conference to mark that occasion on the 13th of October 2002.

In 1983 Professor McLeod was a recipient of the Mona Tobias Award for Service to Learning Disabilities from Learning Difficulties Australia. The Award recognises a person who has made an outstanding contribution to Australian education of people with learning difficulties, perhaps leadership, research, practice, teacher and community education.

The training of many educators working with children with disabilities and his academic work in assessment and intervention of learning disabilities remain his legacy.

On behalf of many who knew, worked with and were trained by Professor McLeod at The University of Queensland and in schools in Australia and Oceania:

Vale Professor John McLeod.

Associate Professor Christa van Kraayenoord, Acting Director and Director of the Fred and Eleanor Schonell Special Education Research Centre 2000-2005, and currently Honorary Research Associate Professor, School of Education, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Anne Rosemary Barton
12 March 1954 - 16 May 2020

LDA consultant members, through their long involvement with their networks and our professional development days, develop close professional friendships over their years of service. Thus, it was with great sorrow that we learned of Anne Barton's passing in May earlier this year.

Anne Barton graduated from Melbourne University with a BA (Hons) and Dip.Ed, and then from Monash University with a B.Spec. Ed and an M.Ed (Spec Ed). She put her qualifications to good use at Princes Hill High School, Luther College North Croydon and Methodist Ladies' College, along with emergency teaching at various schools. She commenced her career as a Geography and History teacher before moving into her preferred area of Special Education.

For the period 2000 until May 2018 Anne developed a practice as an Educational Consultant in the Balwyn area, whilst maintaining an ongoing connection to schools as an adviser as well as filling in particular roles as needed. Anne was a valued member of the LDA Canterbury/Kew Consultants Network group. Her keen mind was a bonus for the members attending the meetings of this group as she was extremely well read and always had a contribution to make. Anne also became a member of the LDA Consultants Support Group during this time, and in this capacity contributed to the advice and support provided to the Convenor and members of the LDA Consultants Committee on policies and procedures relating to Consultant membership.

VALE Anne Barton.

Olivia Connelly is the Convenor of the LDA Consultants Committee.

Consultant Notes

Olivia Connelly, Convenor, Consultants Committee

Greetings to LDA members! It is with excitement (but also a little trepidation) that I introduce myself as the new LDA Consultant Convenor. As a consultant member for thirteen years and a member of the Consultants Committee for four years, I was deeply honoured when Ann Ryan approached me to take on the role of Consultant Convenor when she resigned from the position. I do thank Ann for continuing to mentor me in this new position even though she has resigned from LDA Council – she has made huge contributions to LDA both as consultant convenor and as Secretary of LDA. Two other members of the Consultants Committee, Lyn Franklin and Juanita Lee, have also recently resigned from the LDA Council, and I would like to note here how much they have both contributed to the association and the consultants group. Fortunately, Juanita remains on the Consultants Committee, and I am sure she will be of great support to me as I settle into my new role.

The Council News in this Bulletin includes tributes to Ann, Lyn and Juanita from other LDA Council members as well as from me.

The publication of this Bulletin, with its theme of learning struggles and resilience, is very timely indeed for the LDA Consultant group. As a parent of two children in Foundation and Year 3 respectively, I've seen first-hand the pressure teachers have been under to adapt their teaching practices to the remote learning platform during COVID 19. The education system has been put under greater scrutiny as parents attempt to implement lesson plans that may work in the classroom, but often yield highly variable results when placed in the hands of parents who are doing their best to juggle the overwhelming demands of work and schooling, as well as the stress of living through a pandemic. As a result, many students with disabilities have struggled not only with their academic studies but also with their mental health. I and many of my consultant colleagues have been flooded with calls for additional support as parents, desperate for guidance, have reached out for assistance as they attempt to support their children who are struggling with the academic, organizational and mental health demands of home-schooling.

The role of the specialist teacher consultant in assisting our students to engage in their learning has never been more important than it is during this unprecedented time. Our LDA consultant teachers are highly experienced practitioners in the delivery of evidence-based programs to students with a range of disabilities, including intellectual disability, autism, developmental language delays, specific learning disabilities, attention deficit and executive function challenges. In addition to this, they are also counselors who strive to foster resilience and perseverance in the students and parents they work with. The journey through the school system is a long one for students with additional needs and our specialist consultants provide ongoing, informal mental health assistance to their students, with whom they develop strong bonds over their years of working together. I've noted with interest the rise in online professional development seminars on counseling skills for professionals working with students with disabilities.

Through individual sessions, specialist teachers provide external scaffolds to shore up and develop resilience in children who suffer from the negative academic and emotional impacts of their disability. The knowledge and expertise of LDA specialist consultants is essential to assist parents to advocate for their children, provide clear advice in Student Support Group Meetings as well as assist in Individual Learning Plan development in both literacy and numeracy at primary and secondary level. This comprehensive provision of services is consistent with the requirement that all providers must comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the relevant disability discrimination legislation of their state or territory (see Fact Sheet provided by the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training at *https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/fact-sheet-1-disability-discrimination-act-1992*). This cannot be achieved without developing professional and caring partnerships with students and parents that support mental health in the process. After all, what is academic achievement without robust mental health?

Thankfully, many specialist teachers and allied health professionals have risen to the challenge and embraced remote learning. I am so proud of the way LDA specialist teacher consultants have acquired the new skills of delivering online sessions with awe inspiring speed as they have responded to the calls of parents eager for additional support.

With that, a reminder that we are always on the lookout for dedicated specialist teachers to join our team. Please contact Elaine on 0406 388 091, or email me at *consultant.convenor@ldaustralia.org* for further information.

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