

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR THE
ADVANCEMENT OF LITERACY

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By Dr. Andrea Salins

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DO READING PROBLEMS AFFECT THE MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN WITH HEARING LOSS?

BY DR. ANDREA SALINS

The World Health Organisation estimated that globally, 34 million children have at least some degree of hearing loss. In Australia, three to six out of every 1,000 children present with at least some degree of diagnosable hearing loss, many of whom struggle with reading problems throughout schooling. We know that reading problems are associated with poor mental health in typically hearing children. Do children with hearing and reading problems also face similar risks? [Read the article here.](#)

GRADUATE CERTIFICATES IN EDUCATION – LITERACY

We offer evidence-based postgraduate certificates designed by internationally recognised researchers and educators. Both graduate certificates can be used towards a Master's degree in Education.

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Expand your knowledge of the foundational skills necessary for the development of reading ability at any age. Learn the theory and research surrounding early reading instruction, as well as build plan, deliver and evaluate evidence-based reading instruction that meets the needs of all learners.
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Build your knowledge and practice in how to teach vocabulary, reading fluency, reading comprehension and writing. Lead your colleagues in developing effective instruction in text-level reading and writing skills for all students.

[Register here for our 2025 courses.](#)

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY

Our ARC Laureate research currently has a range of research studies in progress targeting literacy in high school students. We would work closely in partnership with your school to identify a mutually beneficial collaboration. If you are interested, [please contact the project coordinator Jude Lawrie.](#)

Improving students' literacy skills
so they can pursue their dreams



AUSTRALIAN
LITERACY CLINIC
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What we offer

At the Australian Literacy Clinic, our expert researchers and clinicians:

- assess literacy skills and related areas of cognition
- provide detailed evaluation reports
- use best scientific evidence to develop recommendations and intervention plans
- offer professional development for teachers and clinicians
- undertake world-leading research in literacy.

Do reading problems affect the mental health of children with hearing loss?

By Dr. Andrea Salins

The World Health Organisation estimated that globally, 34 million children have at least some degree of hearing loss. In Australia, three to six out of every 1,000 children present with at least some degree of diagnosable hearing loss, many of whom struggle with reading problems throughout schooling. We know that reading problems are associated with poor mental health in typically hearing children. Do children with hearing and reading problems also face similar risks?

What does research say?

Children with all types and severities of hearing problems, including those who use hearing aids and cochlear implants, are at risk of experiencing reading difficulties. Separately, [research has shown](#) that they experience increased mental health symptoms including anxiety, peer problems, depression and behavioural issues. In children without hearing problems, reading problems have consistently been [linked to poor mental health](#). Therefore, a worry was that children with hearing difficulties may be doubly susceptible to poor mental health if they also struggle with reading.

Recently, my colleagues and I [examined the reading and mental health relationship](#) in primary school children with reported ear and hearing difficulties (e.g., persistent ear infection, permanent hearing loss). We analysed four longitudinal databases involving more than 15 000 children aged 5-11 from Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States and found that children with ear and hearing difficulties presented with lower reading skills and experienced significantly more symptoms of anxiety, attention problems, peer problems, and behavioural problems than children with typical hearing. They also had a lower opinion of themselves as readers. Difficulty paying attention at age 5 was linked to reading problems at age 7. Further, those who had poor reading ability at age 7 were more likely to have trouble paying attention, experience problems with peer relationships, depression, behavioural problems, anxiety, and poor self-concept, and to be bullied at age 9 or 11. This means that mental health symptoms observed in these children could be related not just to their hearing problems, but also to their reading difficulties. In our study, hearing loss did not alter the strength of the association between reading and mental health symptoms in children. An important future step will be to examine whether degree of hearing loss has an impact on this association.

What can we do?

When a child is identified with some degree of hearing difficulty, their literacy needs are often monitored by teachers and/or clinicians. Our results suggest that in addition to literacy, it is important to also monitor mental health symptoms. Unfortunately, there are very few studies that specifically examine the effect of integrated reading and mental health intervention. The existing evidence suggests that such integrated interventions are effective at least for children with reading anxiety. Drawing on broader [research in children with hearing difficulties](#), we can say that early intervention, explicit literacy instruction, introducing books early and encouraging reading engagement through independent and shared reading activities are important ways to increase reading practice and create positive literacy experiences.

Read “Hearing difficulties linked to reading-related mental health issues: World first ACU research” in [Hearing Practitioner Australia](#). [Listen to Dr. Salins discuss this research](#) with David Wood.

MYTH: “*Learning to read is a natural process*”

FACTS:

- Learning to read is not a natural process; it relies on "secondary knowledge," that needs formal instruction and practice to develop.
- This is because reading is a recent cultural invention and not hardwired into the brain like learning to speak.
- Unlike primary skills (e.g., language acquisition), learning to read involves training the brain to perform tasks it did not naturally evolve to do.

[Listen to Greg Ashman's podcast here.](#)

PhD scholarship opportunity

A PhD scholarship is available for an international or domestic student to join Dr. Signy Wegener on an ARC-funded DECRA Fellowship. The project is titled: ‘Bridging the decoding-vocabulary gap during children’s reading’ and will focus on how children adjust their initial mispronunciations as they learn to read irregular words.

[Read more about the scholarship here.](#) Anyone interested in applying should [email Dr. Wegener first.](#)