

A history of Learning Difficulties Australia: part four – managing change

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Abstract

As the Australian Remedial Educational Association (AREA) approached its silver jubilee in 1990, significant changes were occurring in education. The principle, if not the practice, of integration into mainstream schools for students with disabilities had been widely adopted by education authorities, one outcome being an expectation that class teachers would provide for much greater diversity within the mainstream. Broader changes in education, including in end-of-school assessment, posed further challenges. During the decade from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, AREA was occupied in much internal discussion as Council searched for a framework that would encompass new ideas about special education while maintaining its service for remedial consultants as a priority. The association overcame financial and other difficulties, surviving with a new name, the Australian Resource Educators Association, to reflect an expansion of membership beyond the traditional concept of remedial teacher.

Changes in special education

By the early 1980s changes were looming in special education. The Victorian integration policy was considered at the time to be far in advance of policies both in other parts of Australia and overseas, with implications for the whole educational community (Jenkinson, 1987). With the introduction of integration teachers qualified in special education into schools, class teachers would be expected to cope with the whole spectrum of learning difficulties and disabilities.

But teachers remained concerned about inadequate support services and class teachers' lack of training in the instruction of students with disabilities. Teachers qualified in special education were reluctant to move out of special schools and abandon specialist programs. Integration teachers were appointed without qualifications in special education, a further cause for concern within AREA¹. Many parents, too, failed to embrace integration. The Victorian Government back-tracked on its initial proposal to phase out special schools, eventually adopting a policy of parent choice which promised equivalent funding for students with disabilities on the basis of educational need, regardless of the setting in which students with disabilities received their education (Jenkinson, 2001).

AREA shared many practical concerns about the Victorian integration policy and its implementation, especially when a Ministry of Education publication, *Advising Disabled Students: A Guide for Teachers*, made no reference to the needs of students who were underachieving or who had learning difficulties². The association endorsed the principles underlying integration, however: the 1985 Mona Tobias Award was presented to Kevin Stone for his

pioneering work in establishing an integration unit in the rural town of Cobram, which had significantly influenced the development of policy in Victoria³.

Despite the large number of students in mainstream schools now being supported under the integration program, students with specific learning disabilities still did not receive assistance within the school system. A review of the program, commissioned by the Victorian Department of School Education (DSE), was quick to point out this fact:

The Commonwealth criteria specifically exclude students with learning disabilities [who]... are a very small percentage of the school community [and] who have specific information processing problems that can be described as a disability. This group of students is not to be confused with the larger group of students (up to 13 per cent) who are often described as having learning difficulties such as socio-economically disadvantaged students.

While there is an acknowledgement of the initiatives provided by DSE to assist students with learning difficulties (e.g. Reading Recovery), there is still a small number of students with severe learning disabilities who need some additional support. These learning disabled students could have their educational needs more adequately met from within the regular school program if:

- (i) the school is supported in gaining the expertise to identify these students as having specific/severe learning disabilities as distinct from learning difficulties, and
- (ii) the school has access to teacher training programs, professional development activities and other support. (Cullen & Brown, 1992, pp. 14-15)

The report only added to confusion over definitions of learning disability. Deakin University academic, Des Pickering, who chaired the Cullen-Brown Implementation Advisory Committee, was invited to attend a Council meeting to report on its implications. Pickering suggested that AREA, as a professional association, could devise an operational definition of learning disability based on research findings to argue their case for support. AREA organised a committee of representatives of various organisations to “formulate a viable definition of learning disability that would be accepted by government”⁴.

The result was a set of recommendations by AREA to the Ministry of Education, relating specifically to the distinction between learning disabilities and the more general concept of learning difficulties:

It is proposed that the term learning difficulties be used to refer to a learning condition displayed by students who have difficulty learning academic skills potentially due to one or more of a number of different causes. The term learning disabilities is proposed to be used to refer to those students who have severe difficulty learning academic skills, due to specific ‘narrow-band’ cognitive influences that in turn may be linked with neuropsychological factors.

The need for making this distinction has implications for issues associated with both diagnosis and teaching. In terms of teaching, learning disabled students are proposed to need instruction in the cognitive abilities necessary for learning in a particular area of academic performance, as well as in the academic area itself.

... Diagnosis of learning disabilities needs to target both the existence and extent of difficulty in the associated cognitive areas⁵.

AREA also referred to the extent to which the needs of children with both learning difficulties and learning disabilities were unmet, questioning whether such programs as Reading Recovery were designed to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities. The association recommended cooperative actions to address these issues, including facilitating provision of information to schools, preparing a professional development package, developing a registration or certification system for teachers and others offering their services as ‘remedial educators’, and offering forums of ‘experts’ in learning disabilities⁶. These proposals remained firmly within AREA’s traditional mould.

Seeking a new identity

Early in 1983 AREA Council met to consider future developments in the context of changing societal, economic, and technological expectations. A discussion

paper considered these changes in terms of the needs of students, of the school and the teacher, and of AREA⁷.

In relation to students, the paper identified a need to update teaching and evaluation practices in the light of increased understanding of the learning process, predicting that the meaning of such terms as ‘learning difficulty’, ‘learning disabled’ and ‘low achiever’ would need to be modified in relation to medico-biological and psycho-educational models of human learning. The ability of remedial students to cope in a more technologically complex world was also considered in relation to new skills that were likely to emerge.

Changing models of special needs provision implied future changes in the roles and responsibilities of classroom and remedial resource support teachers. Both would require additional training to accommodate changes in teaching methods, delivery of instruction, and evaluation. Legal requirements and economic accountability implied a need for a code of ethics for remedial teachers and possible changes in AREA’s criteria for accrediting remedial education consultants. Finally, increasing use of technology meant changes in the way in which information was disseminated.

When it came to considering the needs of AREA, the association did not yet appear ready for radical change. Much of the debate centred on immediate solutions rather than on the longer term role envisaged in the discussion paper. Apart from considering changes in the association’s aims and objectives, discussion focused on improvements in office administration; introduction of special interest groups; improving communication; whether new services were needed or some existing services should be curtailed; improving policy-making and decision-making; and greater member involvement⁸.

Council also considered the association’s name. The term ‘remedial’ had become less acceptable to the educational community: it did not reflect the role of the resource teacher and was out of favour in government schools, reinforcing a perception that AREA was biased towards independent schools⁹. Council wanted to keep the ‘AREA’ acronym, and agreed to put a proposal to a general meeting to change the name to ‘AREA/Australian Remedial Education Association/A Resource for all Educators’. This somewhat clumsy proposal had a less than enthusiastic response, and further action was deferred until 1987 when Council agreed to canvas all members for suggestions for a new name for both the association and the journal¹⁰.

The role of the association continued to be a focus into the mid-1990s. Early in 1989 the president, Dr Pat Long, called a dinner meeting of Council to discuss new directions, with “members to think seriously about issues which they believe should be discussed or reviewed”¹¹.

Nominated issues included the difficulty in maintaining membership, and identifying the clientele, which in the past had been seen as the ‘intelligent underachiever’. Students with other disabilities, including sensory impairments, emotional disturbance, and English as a second language, were also presenting for individual help, so that ‘students with special needs’ might be more appropriate. Council questioned whether there should be more focus on parents, and the fields and activities AREA should concentrate on. Crucial to the discussion was whether AREA was primarily a professional association concerned with a code of ethics and professional standards, or whether it should have a wider role. Practical concerns included the Australian Special Book Service (ASBS), the need to advertise and to attract sponsors, affiliations, and publications – especially the *Bulletin* and journal¹². A follow-up meeting raised more general questions about AREA’s aims and objectives, whether the association was meeting the needs of members, and what short- and long-term changes were needed¹³. There were no immediate answers, but the discussion foreshadowed changes that would follow in the 1990s.

Consultant referral service

Although there was much questioning of the direction AREA should take, support for consultant members remained the dominant role. The referral service was growing: in 1982–83 the number of requests for referral had reached 150, and by 1986 this number had more than doubled to 340. The high volume of enquiries was, according to the president, Dianne Betts, an indication “that the need for adequate services to students with special needs will continue to be an Association priority”¹⁴.

Nevertheless, more publicity was needed. The General Practitioners Association agreed to place a notice in their journal about the referral service¹⁵. An article in the *Waverley Gazette* produced a large number of enquiries from the Waverley area¹⁶. Council also considered ways of expanding into country areas. A proposal to apply for funding for a van to provide counselling and remedial services for teachers and schools in rural areas did not get off the ground; more feasible suggestions involved working with SPELD to develop a register of people available to work as consultants outside the metropolitan area, and a statement in the *Bulletin* that AREA was interested in fostering member groups in country areas.

Criteria for consultant membership were amended in 1986 to include a minimum of three years documented teaching experience in a recognised institution or its equivalent, as determined by Council¹⁷. As the association grew, it became necessary to vet qualifications of members more strictly. Under Dr Pat Long’s presidency,

a Consultants’ Register was set up and applicants were required to provide documentary evidence of their qualifications in addition to their experience in remedial or special education¹⁸. Consultant members continued to be mainly primary-trained teachers, reflecting the fact that the majority of referrals were children of primary age¹⁹.

New consultants received a certificate and *Guidelines for AREA Consultants in Private Practice*. The latter was a practical document developed by the Consultants’ Sub-committee under Anne Pringle, aimed at ensuring that consultants maintained professional standards in their work with clients. Consultants were advised to discuss their role and area of specialisation with parents and to provide printed information on their fees for specific services. A suggested schedule of hourly fees, based on Department of Education rates for four-year trained teachers, was recommended. Procedures for referral to other professionals, contact with schools when appropriate, the need to preserve confidentiality of medical and other records when reporting to other agencies, and guidelines for recording data and report writing were also included. Consultants were advised to take out professional indemnity insurance²⁰.

Commercial learning schemes and tutors were multiplying: many “disillusioned and redundant” teachers were setting up in private practice, often attracting students who required more than just coaching. This situation posed a threat, not just to the livelihood of qualified remedial teachers in private practice, but to standards of remedial education, as many of the teachers lacked postgraduate qualifications in special education. The president, Anne Pringle, challenged Council members to declare a stronger stand for students with learning difficulties, urging them to think beyond the image of the remedial teacher “in the broom cupboard”, as the classroom helper, the “easy solution for difficult cases”, or the unacknowledged source of valuable teaching ideas:

... there is a great deal of prejudice to overcome and a lack of confidence in [the] special educator’s own right to work as s/he feels is appropriate. Much of this is imposed by the community and particularly [by] the regular school teacher’s defensive attitude towards his or her skills in the classroom.

The genuine full-time private practitioner ... is particularly vulnerable, having little, if any, support from the teaching profession. The practitioner has no convenient resources supplied by the government or institution and no securities. Fees are based on face to face work only. Clientele is derived from ‘success’ cases or advertising. Should a pupil not succeed in the eyes of the parent or regular school teacher, the private practitioner is placed in an unfavourable

position which can label the practitioner's abilities unfairly²¹.

The work involved in matching students to consultants was substantial, and to relieve the administrative load Rosemary Carter was appointed Referral Service Officer in 1991²², a position she continued to fill in a voluntary capacity until April 2002. The task became more complex when financial difficulties prompted introduction of a fee, equivalent to the fee for one teaching session, for consultant members receiving a referral from the service²³.

Whether or not as a result of the referral fee, there was a small decline in consultant membership between 1990 and 1992. Nevertheless, AREA maintained its expectations of consultants' professionalism. Council approved the addition of a paragraph to the *Guidelines* stating its expectation that consultants would observe professional ethical standards in all aspects of their work, and reserved the right to withdraw consultant registration if these standards were not met²⁴. The criteria for consultant membership were amended to include "additional postgraduate training equivalent to at least one year of a recognised course of study in the area of special education including a supervised practicum"²⁵. Examples of such courses included the Graduate Diploma in Special Education, Bachelor of Special Education, and Bachelor of Education (Special).

Private practice was becoming more complex as business regulations changed, and in 1993 AREA initiated support group meetings for consultants. These meetings provided a forum for discussion of a range of issues, including the role and responsibilities of private consultants, student and parent perspectives, and individual cases that concerned group members²⁶.

In a strong defence of remedial teaching, Nola Firth, a Council member, reiterated the advantages of private consultancy (Firth, 1993). Consultants could assess a child's abilities independently of the school situation and had a better understanding of the nature of learning difficulties than was usually possessed by class teachers. Assessment could include information about the child's achievements and difficulties from several sources, including school reports, medical history, parents, students themselves, and current assessments which school personnel may not have the time to do or which may not fit an ideology that was against singling out individual students. Specialist help could be offered by the consultant or through referral to other professionals. The one-to-one situation was accepting and supportive and could help raise the child's self-esteem. Further, the consultant could be an "independent and authoritative advocate" for the child, facilitating communication between parents, teachers and other professionals.

Where did referrals come from? A breakdown of

enquiries in 1989 showed that most (37.5 per cent) came from schools, followed by SPELD (16.7 per cent) and parents (16.2 per cent). Fellow members accounted for about 10 per cent and Yellow Pages advertising about 6 per cent, the remainder coming from psychologists (4.3 per cent) and paraprofessionals (4.1 per cent), student services, the Krongold Centre (Monash University), and the Australian Council for Educational Research. Just over half the students referred were at upper primary level (50.8 per cent), with, apart from a handful of adults, the remainder distributed fairly evenly among lower primary, and upper and lower secondary²⁷. Data collected in mid-1990 indicates that just under one fifth of referrals were from independent schools. The majority (54 per cent) required assistance with reading and general areas, followed by 43 per cent requiring assistance with maths²⁸. Students needing help with upper secondary maths remained the most difficult to place.

Membership

Although there had been pleasing increases in membership over the first few years of the association, AREA was constantly seeking ways to expand. Fluctuations in financial membership occurred over the years, but at fewer than 1000 members AREA remained small compared to other professional associations. The most important change in membership over the association's first 25 years was in its composition, from predominantly remedial teachers in independent schools and private practice to a much wider representation in which independent school teachers were now a minority. A survey of AREA subscribers in 1990 indicated that the Ministry of Education accounted for 40 per cent of members, independent schools 25 per cent, and Catholic schools 20 per cent. Full time primary and secondary special education teachers made up 53 per cent of the membership, class teachers 11 per cent, and the remainder were specialists in special education and related areas, including academics. This balance would continue over the next few years²⁹. The great majority – 89 per cent – described themselves as working in the language area. Although the proportion of members from tertiary institutions was relatively small, the active participation of academic staff in teacher training colleges, soon to merge into universities across the state, would have significant long-term implications for AREA.

The association received a boost when the fledgling Australian Language Disorders Association (ALDA) decided to join with AREA³⁰. ALDA membership was evenly balanced between speech therapists and special education teachers, but with only 68 members it could not remain viable on its own. Following discussion between

the two organisations, AREA Council formed a sub-committee to examine the amalgamation, which it finally agreed to accept in December 1990³¹. Maureen Pollard, ALDA Secretary, was co-opted on to Council, and ALDA was given a segment in the *Bulletin*. Other benefits for ALDA members were increased professional and public awareness of specific language disorders, AREA publications, professional development opportunities, and, for qualified ALDA members, inclusion on the AREA Consultants' Register³².

Services for members were mainly in the form of publications and professional development. The *Bulletin* continued as a forum for regular communication. In 1986 each issue adopted a different theme: for example, reading comprehension, spelling, process writing, and the needs of secondary students, and in 1987 a regular case study was added, based on consultants' experiences. Other regular contributions included Council news, notices of outings, reviews, books available from ASBS, articles, information and research, and a thematic component to include ideas and strategies³³. By 1990 the *Bulletin* was benefiting from greater sophistication with the use of computers and word processing, and had changed to A4 size. The format changed yet again in 1991 with an experimental version of an A3 sheet folded into A4 and printed in two columns.

The other major AREA publication, the *Australian Journal of Remedial Education* also continued to flourish (see Part Five in this series).

A long-term commitment of Council was to expand both the number and range of activities offered in AREA's professional development program. The program for 1984 included process writing, teaching strategies for older failing readers, parent communication, resources and strategies for spelling, and visits to the Department of Education Reading Research and Treatment Centre, Altona Special Education Unit, and Glendonald School for the Deaf³⁴. For the first half of 1985 activities included Applications for Computer Resources, a solicitor speaking on Children's Rights and Teachers' Liability within the School Setting, a visit to the Alfred Hospital to observe a case conference, and an all-day seminar on Whole Language Teaching and Reading Assessment by Professor Dorothy Watson of the University of Missouri³⁵. Catering for an increasing demand for remedial education in maths, John Munro continued to run the Mathematics Learning Centre at Melbourne State College³⁶.

In 1988 a successful seminar was organised in conjunction with the Australian Association of Special Education and the Australian Reading Association, with presenters from the USA, Professors Ken and Yetta Goodman. The Goodmans were promoted as "internationally acclaimed proponents of the whole

language approach to developing literacy in children", which had become a significant trend in the teaching of reading. A donation of \$1500 from Mrs Brenda Sleight was used to make a videotape of another workshop by the Goodmans on their return to Australia to lecture on 'Language and thinking in school: A whole language curriculum'³⁷.

Attendance at workshops offered by people without appropriate professional qualifications, one being a proposed workshop on educational kinesiology, was not encouraged. Members were advised that AREA Council did not endorse this workshop or other "non-educational" activities run by persons without recognised qualifications. While such presentations provided an opportunity to be informed about methods which claimed to assist persons with learning difficulty, they had, as yet, no basis in recognised research. Members should question the validity of any method and its claim to alleviate learning problems within a short time. As teachers responsible for the welfare of children in their care, members were also in a position to advise parents about appropriate professional services, and if in doubt could seek advice from members of the teaching profession who had undertaken a higher level of study involving research and expertise in a particular field³⁸.

Despite fluctuating attendances, the professional development program would continue to be a crucial component of AREA's services to members, offering a wide variety of topics which regularly included classroom use of computers.

Submissions and lobbying

With changes in end-of-school assessment, equity for students with learning difficulties was the subject of a submission by AREA to the examining authority, the Victorian Institute for Secondary Education (VISE). The submission emphasised the importance of providing wide publicity about procedures for applying for special assistance. At the invitation of VISE, two AREA representatives met with VISE Chairman, Dr Lindsay MacKay, to discuss these issues, followed by a letter to VISE regarding problems of student communication and an offer to assist with an appropriate format for an information brochure³⁹.

On 19 March 1986, AREA sent VISE a draft article prepared for the *Bulletin* on a 'consideration of disadvantage' program proposed by VISE for students presenting for the HSC. The Registrar of VISE was critical of the proposed article, and provided a copy of the VISE Advice to Students, which it suggested should be published as an alternative. The Registrar noted in his reply:

Having studied your article I think I should make it quite clear that the provision of scribes for candidates with learning disabilities is essentially a last resort situation and then only with the strongest medical support and the principal's recommendation ... Generally speaking, special examination arrangements for students with learning disabilities will take the form of extra time concessions⁴⁰.

Memos accompanying the response set out strict limits on the extra time allowed, depending on the nature of the disability, and the procedures for applying for special consideration.

The president, Dianne Betts, responded with a modified document which was specific to learning disability and HSC, identifying AREA's concerns as written expression, reading skill and reading comprehension⁴¹. The response also noted that

AREA supports the strict controls on granting ... special provisions ... : only those with a definite identifiable handicap should apply, and each application must be backed by reports from professionals who have assessed the case ... such a report could include reports from a medical practitioner, from a psychologist, from a specialist in reading and from appropriate staff at the school (p. 3).

Discussions on assessment equity continued to occupy Council meetings as VISE became VCAB (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Board). At the end of 1989 AREA proposed to develop a policy statement regarding the assessment of students with learning disabilities in country schools, and sent a list of questions to VCAB in advance for discussion at another planned meeting. In due course a document was received from a VCAB Working Party on Integration entitled 'VCAB Advice on Special Provision for Students with Physical Disabilities or other Impairments', which AREA planned to publish in the *Bulletin*. A sub-committee formed to consider issues relating to equity now added problem-solving in mathematics, in which there was a large verbal component, to the main areas of concern for students with learning difficulties⁴².

Administration

Other issues took a back seat as AREA became more entwined in administrative concerns. After more than 20 years it was time to fine-tune AREA's legal and administrative basis. In 1987 AREA was incorporated under the *Associations Incorporation Act*, and an amendment was made to the Constitution limiting to three the number of annual terms a president could hold office. The amendment also clarified the terms of Council members:

The Association shall be governed by a council

consisting of the honorary officers of the Association and eight members. Each member of the Council shall be elected to serve for one year. The honorary officers shall be members of the Association and shall consist of a President, Vice-President, Honorary Secretary, Honorary Assistant Secretary, and Honorary Treasurer⁴³.

In 1994 AREA adopted the concept of 'presidential succession', with the president-elect to be a member of Council each year⁴⁴. As national membership broadened, postal voting for office bearers replaced the annual election at the AGM. Council began to discuss ways of including more interstate members in decision-making, resolving to appoint an interstate Council member to attend one meeting each year and to participate in the remaining meetings via teleconference⁴⁵.

Financial concerns would continue to plague AREA well into the 1990s, but came to a head when the National Conference, held in Melbourne in 1990, made a loss of over \$12,000, placing the association in a precarious financial position. As a celebration of the first 25 years of AREA, the conference had an ambitious program but had attracted fewer than 200 registrants. At a meeting of Council, attended by accountant Humphrey Clegg and solicitor Alwyn Samuel, a sub-committee was formed to examine ways of cutting publication costs, particularly for printing, mailing and handling of advertising, which were a major drain on the association's resources⁴⁶. There was no question that AREA should continue to publish the journal, but several cost-cutting measures were recommended for the *Bulletin*. Each issue was to be restricted to no more than eight leaves and to be A4 size so that it could be mailed with the journal. Collating would be done by Council members. The journal print run would be closely monitored to avoid printing a surplus, with care taken in distribution to ensure that it was not sent to non-member subscribers⁴⁷.

Cost-cutting was also sought in other areas. A further meeting discussed a phasing-down of ASBS activities with a view to terminating salaried staff from December 1990. Council debated whether the role of the ASBS was to provide a service to teachers rather than to make money, but agreed that the service should not be an encumbrance. However ASBS could not compete with educational publishers whose representatives sold books and materials direct to schools. Cuts in funding to special education departments meant that orders were frequently not large enough to justify a discount, in some cases necessitating a surcharge on small orders for ASBS to break even⁴⁸.

Another issue that occupied AREA during 1990 was the so-called 'sticker campaign', to be run in conjunction with SPELD under the general title of 'Literacy for Everyone'⁴⁹. The campaign involved printing of 120,000

stickers. Failure to obtain sponsors, unauthorised printing of a letter containing both grammatical and factual errors, and costs incurred in paying a marketing company led to disagreements between Council and the campaign sub-committee and the resignation of two Council members⁵⁰. Finally, a joint meeting of AREA and SPELD agreed to abandon the campaign.

A resolution was passed that no member of Council should authorise any work involving a financial commitment without Council's authorisation. Further, no person was to be employed without a written contract approved by Council which specified the purpose of the contract, the time involved, estimated costs, including possible inflation effects, procedures for payment, set times for review of the contract, and a clause that would allow the contract to cease if it was in AREA's interest. Anyone associated with AREA was to be fully informed of AREA's objectives and functions as a professional body dedicated to assisting children with learning difficulties⁵¹.

It was a difficult time for AREA, not least because divisions had been created between long-standing Council members who had, over the existence of the association, made substantial contributions. Options for the future were put forward, including closing AREA altogether, putting it into recession until more interest and finance were available, continuing with reduced services to cut costs, or continuing at the present level and attempting to borrow or raise funds. Another option was to appoint an Executive Officer with a computer to work part-time in low-rent premises⁵².

AREA did not fold, however. The incoming President, Anne Pringle, proposed a new framework for the operation of sub-committees to be discussed by Council, clearly intended to tighten up actions taken on the association's behalf. Ten sub-committees were proposed: conference; workshops and visits; language; maths; computers; study skills; equity; publicity; publications, and policies. Each member of Council would convene a sub-committee which would consist of at least four members, and the convenor would provide a report on activities at each Council meeting. Correspondence was to be typed on official letterhead and copies retained at the AREA office. When a more formal structure for sub-committees came into force, a chart was drawn up to indicate lines of responsibility⁵³.

As the difficulties continued, Pringle continued to push for greater involvement by Council members in the future of AREA, writing again on 11 October 1990 to outline current problems. "The outcome of the meeting tonight will determine the directions AREA will take," she wrote. "The financial situation will be discussed in detail and the result ... will depend on you as a Council member."

At this point Pringle enlisted the assistance of Peter

Jeffery, who had worked in educational organisations both professionally and in an honorary capacity, to review the future viability of AREA. Jeffery recommended that AREA continue as "a worthwhile body representative of the special educator"⁵⁴, but made several recommendations that involved restructuring of AREA's administration to achieve substantial cost savings. These included discontinuing the rented office, disposing of ASBS, establishing a link with a school or tertiary institution, outsourcing much of the administrative work, and putting the various activities of AREA, including conferences, on a more business-like footing⁵⁵. Over the next few years most of these recommendations were implemented.

By mid-1991 the financial position had improved, and the auditor, Humphrey Clegg, reported a surplus of \$4,958, helped by an increase of \$10,000 in subscriptions over the previous year – attributed, with hindsight, to the previous year's conference⁵⁶.

It was a much-needed boost of confidence, and in October 1991 Anne Pringle wrote to the Institute of Education at the University of Melbourne, seeking closer ties with that organisation⁵⁷. Tenancy of the Kew office was not renewed – indeed it was questioned whether AREA actually needed office space since by now the ASBS had moved to Methodist Ladies College (MLC), and most business was conducted by mail or phone. On 11 June 1992, Pringle met with Dr Graeme Clunies-Ross, Head of the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education at the University of Melbourne, and two of his colleagues to discuss the possibility of AREA using office space at the university. AREA, which would remain independent, would require a room with a telephone "for one or two persons to attend to office duties". In return AREA could assist the Department by providing opportunities for students to undertake practicum with remedial consultants. One week later, conditions and expectations were agreed and the office was moved. Darryl Greaves was delegated to liaise with AREA on behalf of the university. It was his first contact with the association; later he would be elected to Council and become President⁵⁸.

The termination of ASBS combined with reduced rent and publicity costs gave AREA a much sounder financial base. In 1992 the auditor reported another surplus. This position would be maintained over a number of years as revenue from referrals and workshops started to pick up⁵⁹. Relocation to the University of Melbourne also provided a central meeting place for the association, professional stimulus, and an opportunity to reorganise AREA's services⁶⁰.

The Mona Tobias Award continued as an annual event. In 1993 AREA inaugurated the Bruce Wicking

Award, which had been set up by Bruce Wicking's family and friends to be administered by AREA. Wicking had been deputy principal of Glamorgan, the Geelong Grammar preparatory school, during the 1960s and early 1970s. His philosophy of education, to "let them run a little", was expounded in his books. In the mid-1970s Wicking founded Currajong, in East Malvern, a school for "intelligent underachievers". The award was made to an individual or organisation who, in the opinion of the judging panel, had made an innovative and continuing contribution to the education of children with special needs. The first recipient was Patricia McCulloch, the founding principal of Andale, a school in Hawthorn which catered for children who failed to thrive in the regular school⁶¹.

Moving ahead: a name change and a proposal for restructuring

A new name for the association had still not been decided, and in 1993 a committee was convened, with Darryl Greaves as chair, to resolve this issue. Greaves suggested that 'Australian Resource Educators Association' would provide a broader focus, and a majority of council members agreed to present this proposal to AREA members at the next AGM⁶².

Greaves (1993) stated his case in the *Bulletin*. He referred to the fact that AREA had been considering a change of name for several years, based on negative connotations of the word 'remedial', which implied that the problem lay with the child. While it could be argued that 'remedial' was a "well-known and respected" word, the sub-committee believed that AREA should reflect the professional interests of its members. The association was seeking to expand its membership, and wanted to include all teachers who had an interest in students with special needs, not just those who saw themselves as 'remedial'. The name change and the broadening of focus which it reflected were, according to Greaves, significant events in the life of AREA, and he gave credit to the sub-committee's open-mindedness in reaching a decision. The choice kept the AREA acronym but was more inclusive of membership.

At the 1994 Annual General Meeting members present agreed to an amendment to Clause 1 of the constitution, finally approving the change of name to Australian Resource Educators Association.

In 1994 a sub-committee, convened by Nola Firth, was set up to examine the concept of chapters within AREA⁶³. Its aim was "to clarify the currently very broad title of 'Australian Resource Educators Association' and to clarify the sub-groups within it and their roles". Chapters could be based initially on the current functions

of AREA with addition of a new area for 'resources', allowing the present areas of interest to be consolidated before adding new areas. New areas would come from the interests of the membership rather than being imposed from above.

The proposed areas were community education, to include public forums, workshops and media exposure, public lectures, and improving community awareness through media releases; teacher education, including a proposed course for upgrading AREA consultants and an advisory service to teachers; special education, supporting the consultants' referral service, but expanded to include advocacy for students in the context of equal opportunity legislation; an advisory committee to provide specialist advice on the current educational needs of children with learning difficulties as a basis for community awareness and lobbying; publications; and finally resources, to include a catalogue of materials, a directory of community resources, and possibly a library.

It was a wide-ranging and comprehensive overview of activities in which AREA might become involved – either as new areas or extending existing activities. However, the concept of chapters was received cautiously, with members urging a need to consider their rationale⁶⁴. Council felt that the headings at this stage were too broad, and that some of the proposed chapters or groups had a large range of tasks that would require representatives from several groups. Lobbying, for example, would require representation from consultants, parents and educators, although this would depend on the nature of the information required.

Darryl Greaves suggested a possible alternative structure with a student group, a tertiary educators' group, and a parents' group to increase lobbying power in the community⁶⁵. The reception was mixed – the sub-committee wanted more information on the role of the proposed student group in relation to AREA's aims; they felt parents would need to be articulate and informed and that parents could be called on to comment on specific issues without forming a membership group. Some members of the Consultants' sub-committee were concerned that a tertiary group might become an 'elite' within AREA, and suggested that it was more productive to consider the purpose of a particular group rather than who would be among its members.

These proposals lapsed over the following year, and it would be 1996 before further planning for AREA, with adoption of a five-year plan, would occur.

Conclusion

The decade from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s had been a difficult one for AREA as the educational

community struggled to cope with integration of students with disabilities, self-management of schools, changes in assessment at the end of secondary schooling, and mergers of the former teacher training colleges into universities with implications for the training of special education teachers.

Despite these changes, funding and structures to support students with specific learning difficulties remained elusive, while, as Pringle noted, government policies had little to offer:

It is difficult to obtain a clear picture of special education policies in Australia, particularly in relation to learning difficulties or disabilities ... The policies presented to date appear to be fragmented without adequate framework ... and information appears limited despite excellent research evidence in Australia and overseas⁶⁶.

In Victoria, the Schools of the Future program, which offered schools greater autonomy in managing their affairs, had begun to divert attention away from centralised provision of services for students with disabilities. John Munro claimed that the “first and major” casualty of this program was servicing the needs of students with learning difficulties⁶⁷. According to Munro, the Australian community was not well enough informed about how people learn, basing judgments on their own experiences rather than on recent findings in literacy and mathematics learning. Most teachers also lacked, and therefore did not incorporate into their teaching, understanding of such concepts as short- and long-term memory, acquisition of orthographic rules, self-attribution learning, and the acquisition of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. “Classroom practice is approximately half a century behind research in learning,” Munro wrote, contrasting this lag with the rapid uptake of research in technology. As a result, teaching methods did not match the needs of the child, and learning disability was still seen primarily as a deficit within the child.

For students with learning disabilities it was not a promising outlook. But AREA had survived a difficult time in its history and could look back with some pride on its achievements as the new millennium approached.

Endnotes

1. AREA Consultants Sub-committee minutes, 28 November 1992.
2. Minutes of Annual General Meeting, 4 July 1983.
3. AREA Council Minutes, 15 April 1985.
4. *AREA Bulletin*, Vol 25 No 4, December 1993.
5. *AREA Bulletin*, Vol 26 No 1, April 1994.
6. Op cit.
7. AREA Council Minutes of Extraordinary Meeting, 27 February 1983.
8. Op cit.
9. AREA Council Minutes, 5 October 1983; 9 November 1983.
10. AREA Council Minutes, 12 October 1987.
11. AREA Council Minutes, 13 February 1989.
12. AREA Council Minutes, 10 April 1989.
13. AREA Council Minutes, 23 July 1989.
14. Minutes of Annual General Meetings, 4 July 1983; 19 June 1986.
15. AREA Council Minutes, 11 February 1985; 30 September 1985.
16. AREA Council Minutes, 1 July 1985.
17. AREA Council Minutes, 11 August 1986.
18. Minutes of Annual General Meeting, 22 June 1988.
19. AREA Consultants Sub-committee Minutes, 28 November 1992; AREA Council Minutes, 3 September 1992.
20. *AREA Guidelines for AREA Consultants in Private Practice*.
21. Letter from Anne Pringle, AREA President, to Council members, 11 October 1990.
22. *AREA Bulletin*, Vol 23 No 1, April 1991.
23. Memo from Ann Sewell, AREA Secretary, to consultants on AREA Register, January 1991.
24. AREA Council Minutes, 6 August 1992.
25. AREA Consultants Sub-committee Minutes, 5 September 1992.
26. Notice to consultant members from Nola Firth, member of consultant committee, n.d.
27. AREA Council Minutes, 23 July 1989; 11 September 1989.
28. AREA Consultants Sub-committee report to Council, 2 June 1990.
29. *AREA Bulletin*, Vol 22 No 4, October 1990; AREA Council Minutes, 5 November 1992.
30. ALDA Newsletter, No 3, July 1990.
31. AREA Council Minutes, 4 June 1990; 6 September 1990; 6 December 1990.
32. Letter from Maureen Pollard to ALDA members, n.d.
33. *AREA Bulletin* Committee, report to Council, June 1990.
34. AREA Council Minutes, 7 December 1983.
35. *AREA Bulletin*, Vol 17 No 1, March 1985.
36. AREA Council Minutes, 23 May 1984.
37. AREA Council Minutes, 12 October 1987; 22 August 1988; Minutes of Annual General Meeting, 22 June 1988.
38. AREA Council minutes of extraordinary meeting, 27 September 1991.
39. AREA Council Minutes, 6 August 1984; 15

- October 1984; 15 April 1985.
40. Letter from D. M. Dodds, Registrar, Victorian Institute of Secondary Education, to Mrs D. M. Betts, President, AREA (Victorian Branch), 4 April 1986.
 41. Letter from D. Betts, President of AREA, to Mr D. Dodd, Registrar, Victorian Institute of Secondary Education, 8 May 1986, and accompanying document Specific Learning Disability and the HSC.
 42. AREA Council Minutes, 13 November 1989; 7 May 1990.
 43. AREA Council Minutes, 11 August 1986; Minutes of Annual General Meetings, 19 June 1986.
 44. *AREA Bulletin*, Vol 26 No 4, November 1994.
 45. *AREA Bulletin*, Vol 27 No 3-4, November 1995.
 46. Minutes of Annual General Meeting, 12 June 1991; AREA Council minutes of extraordinary meeting, 17 September 1990.
 47. AREA Council Minutes, 11 October 1990; Publications Sub-committee minutes, 14 October 1990.
 48. AREA Council Minutes, 11 October 1990.
 49. Lance Ross Advertising, Summary of Discussion Points, Meeting with AREA Council, 19 March 1990.
 50. AREA Council Minutes, 5 March 1990; Minutes of Extraordinary Meeting of 'Sticker Campaign' Sub-committee, 19 March 1990.
 51. AREA Council Minutes, 6 September 1990.
 52. Undated handwritten sheet in minutes folder, probably 1990.
 53. Letter from Anne Pringle to Council members, 26 July 1990.
 54. Minutes of Annual General Meeting, 12 June 1991.
 55. P. Jeffery: 'Review of the recent development of AREA with particular emphasis on the involvement of Peter and Ruth Jeffery and Professional Resources Services', unpub. 24 June 1997.
 56. Memo from H. Clegg to AREA Hon Treasurer, 10 September 1991.
 57. Letter from A. Pringle to J. Phemister, University of Melbourne, 11 October 1991.
 58. Email from A. Pringle to M. de Lemos, 25 April 2006.
 59. Minutes of Annual General Meetings, 3 June 1992; 23 June 1993; 10 June 1994.
 60. R. Jeffery, undated memo.
 61. *AREA Bulletin*, Vol 24 No 2, June 1992.
 62. AREA Council Minutes, 6 May 1993; 15 July 1993; Executive meeting, 17 August 1993; AREA Council Minutes of Extraordinary Meeting, 12 October 1993.
 63. Report of sub-committee to examine Chapters within AREA, undated.
 64. AREA Council Minutes, 10 September 1994.
 65. AREA Consultants Sub-committee Minutes, 27 August 1994.
 66. President's Report (A. Pringle), Annual General Meeting, 23 June 1993.
 67. *AREA Bulletin*, Vol 26 No 2, June 1994.

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