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LEARNING DISABILITIES

Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities

History of Learning Difficulties Australia

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*.

In June 2005 LDA commissioned Dr Jo Jenkinson to write a history of Learning Difficulties Australia.

The history was published as a six part series in the *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities* over the period March 2006 to March 2007 (Volume 11, No 1, 2006 to Volume 12, No 1, 2007).

As noted by Jo Jenkinson:

> Learning Difficulties Australia began life some 40 years ago when a small group of remedial teachers in Melbourne – mostly employed in independent schools –began meeting for informal discussions over coffee. Like most classroom teachers, the members of this group were no strangers to children who were significantly underachieving, especially in reading and mathematics, despite an apparently 'normal' level of intelligence. The learning difficulties of these children were, however, rarely officially acknowledged and there were few opportunities for teachers to receive the specialised training needed to understand and deal with their problems. This situation changed with the introduction in the 1960s of a certificate course in remedial education at the Schonell Special Education Centre, University of Queensland. Many of the teachers who gathered over coffee in those early years had undertaken this course, and valued the continuing support of fellow graduates as they endeavoured to convince school authorities of the benefits of employing qualified remedial teachers. Thus was born the Diagnostic and Remedial Teachers Association of Victoria, its broad aim to foster a professional image of teachers who worked with students with learning difficulties through a range of activities, including a consultancy referral service, lobbying of funding bodies, professional development and publications. In the early 1970s remedial teachers in other states were contacted with the aim of establishing a national body, and the name was changed to Australian Remedial Education Association to reflect this wider coverage. National affiliations changed over the years, but the central administration remained in Melbourne. In the 1990s, as the term 'remedial' fell into disfavour, the name was changed again to Australian Resource Educators Association. More recently the association has adopted the title of Learning Difficulties Australia, which clearly reflects its main focus. *(From the LDA Bulletin, Volume 37, No 3, October 2005.)*

About the Author

Dr Jo Jenkinson was formerly a researcher and consultant on psychological testing with the Australian Council for Educational Research. In the early 1980s she worked at Victoria College, Burwood, on evaluation of an innovative integration program in Ballarat, Victoria. She returned to work at ACER in 1984, and in 1991 she moved to a position as Senior Lecturer at Deakin University, Melbourne, where she coordinated and taught post-graduate courses in Disability Studies and Special Education. Her doctoral thesis in the Department of Psychology, University of Melbourne, examined strategies used by children with and without an intellectual disability in early word recognition. She has published widely in Australia and internationally in the areas of intellectual disability and educational integration, including three books on special education provision and over thirty refereed journal articles and book chapters. Before her retirement Jo completed a Graduate Diploma in Professional Writing at Deakin University, including units in Local History and Biography, and has since published two monographs and several articles on local history in the Dandenong Ranges.

With her background in psychological testing, educational research, and teaching in special education, as well as her more recent interest in historical research, Jo Jenkinson was ideally suited to writing the history of LDA. Her history of LDA provides an invaluable record not only of the foundation and development of LDA as an organisation, but of the ideas that influenced the growing recognition of the special needs of students with learning difficulties, and how these might be addressed, as well as the important role played by teachers with specialist training and skills in supporting students with learning difficulties.

A history of Learning Difficulties Australia

Josephine C. Jenkinson

Abstracted from the *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 2006 to 2007

A history of Learning Difficulties Australia: part one – the beginning

Josephine C. Jenkinson

Abstract

This article is the first in a series tracing the history of Learning Difficulties Australia, an association of educators and other professionals dedicated to the support of people with learning difficulties, especially difficulties in literacy and numeracy. Part one describes the growth of the association from a small group of remedial teachers in Victoria struggling for an identity, to the beginnings of a recognised national body. During this time the association set up a referral service for remedial consultants with strict membership criteria, initiated publication of a successful journal, made submissions to government, conducted workshops and seminars for teachers, and established relationships with other professional bodies concerned with learning difficulties.

The Diagnostic and Remedial Teachers Association of Victoria

Learning Difficulties Australia, as it is now known, began life in 1965, established by a small group of remedial teachers in Melbourne who had been meeting for informal discussions at the Alexandra Coffee Lounge in Collins Street[1]. Like most classroom teachers, the members of this group – most of them employed in independent schools – were no strangers to children of apparently "normal" intelligence who were significantly underachieving. The learning difficulties of these children were rarely officially acknowledged, however, and there had been few opportunities for teachers to receive the specialised training needed to understand and deal with their problems. Postgraduate courses in special education targeted children who at the time were enrolled in special schools, and whose learning problems were often associated with physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities.

The term "learning disabilities" was introduced by Samuel Kirk in the early 1960s to refer to students who had difficulties with school learning, despite normal school experiences and no evidence of intellectual, physical, sensory, or emotional or social problems (Robinson & Deshler, 1995). In the absence of such explanatory evidence, learning disabilities, also referred to as specific learning disabilities to indicate problems in specific areas of school performance such as literacy and numeracy, were presumed to be due to minimal brain injury that was too subtle to be detectable by available technology. For the classroom teacher coping with a wide range of individual differences, such explanatory hypotheses were of little help. These students often slipped through the net, their learning problems unnoticed or neglected until the later years of schooling.

By the 1950s, there was a growing concern that teachers, trained to teach to the "norm", were not meeting the educational needs of students with learning disabilities. Remedial teachers, with varying – sometimes dubious – qualifications to deal with learning problems, were making little impact, and there was a need to establish a clearly defined role that met professional standards (Davidson, 1979).

The impetus for increased professionalism of remedial teaching in Australia came with the appointment of Professor Fred Schonell to the University of Queensland in the early 1950s (Anderson, 1976). Fred and Eleanor Schonell had founded the Schonell Special Education Centre at the University of Queensland, where they set up a certificate course in remedial education. Many of the teachers who gathered over coffee in those early years had undertaken the course, and valued the continuing support of fellow graduates in their endeavours to convince school authorities of the benefits of employing qualified remedial teachers.

It was this core group who decided to formalise their meetings and to widen membership. Thus was born the Diagnostic and Remedial Teachers Association of Victoria (DRTAV), its broad aim to foster a professional image of teachers who worked with students with learning difficulties through a range of activities, including a consultancy referral service, lobbying of funding bodies, professional development and publications. The founding members "did not envisage a trade union type of organisation", the first president, Dennis O'Malley, told members in 1968, "but a group with a professional approach to our work"[2].

A Pilot Working Committee was set up, consisting of Dennis O'Malley (chair), Helena Ballard, Miss M. E. Cowan, Mr T. G. Philpott, and Mr N. Thurbon[3]. The committee was charged, "as professionally qualified remedial teachers and founder members of the

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group", with recommending criteria for membership and associate membership and drafting a working constitution. By November 1967 the committee had drawn up membership forms and begun considering applications for membership[4].

A statement published in an early issue of the association's journal, *Remedial Education* (cited in Davidson, 1979), set out the requirements and expectations of the remedial teacher, and the kind of support expected of the school. In addition to formal qualifications in teaching and certification in diagnosis and remediation, the requirements specified personal characteristics, including "a genuine interest in children and individuals, patience, sympathy and a sense of humour", flexibility and creativity, good communication skills, and stamina. The remedial teacher was expected to be able to conduct "preliminary diagnostic testing", and to be responsible for referring a child to an educational psychologist "indicating the kinds of tests he feels would be useful to the child and the teacher concerned"; to plan and conduct an individual program which would be taught in intensive sessions on a one-to-one basis; to make others directly concerned with the child's education aware of the child's learning difficulties and their practical implications; and "to keep abreast with research and practical ideas in the remedial field" (Davidson, 1979, p. 7).

The school, in turn, was expected to provide a well-equipped resource room, to give remedial teachers full responsibility for their work, and to ensure "the cooperation and understanding of all those within the school framework". There was a strong emphasis on testing in various forms. Recommendations included early identification of children who were likely to present problems using check lists, reading readiness tests, and observation by kindergarten teachers; group testing of all children in intelligence and basic skills; diagnostic testing by a remedial teacher of any child who appeared to be underachieving; gathering of information from other relevant professionals; design and implementation of an individual remedial program by a remedial teacher; ongoing testing to measure the effectiveness of a program; and maintenance of accurate and up-to-date records by the remedial teacher. The remedial teacher was also to be readily accessible to teachers and parents for discussion of a child's development, should initiate seminars and panel discussions to promote awareness of aspects of remedial teaching, and should "uphold the high standards befitting his profession".

A draft constitution was drawn up, with administrative procedures based on the constitution of the Assistant Mistresses' Association of Victoria, and including aims and objectives that had evolved from early meetings of remedial teachers who had shown interest in forming the association[5]. This constitution was presented to members at a general meeting on 10 July 1968, and Dennis O'Malley, as retiring president, later paid tribute to Mrs Ballard and Miss Cowan for their experience and wisdom "in the arduous business" of its drafting[6]. The constitution was accepted unanimously, with minor amendments, on 22 October 1969. At the same meeting, Geoff Saunders, who had been elected president in November 1968, was re-elected, with Mrs A. Pringle elected secretary-treasurer, Mr K. Byers vice-president, and committee members Mrs H. Ballard, Miss Ursula Tyrrell-Gill, Mr E. Butler, and Mr C. Davidson[7]. The governing authority was known as the "Executive" until April 1972, when it changed to "Council" to comply with the articles of the constitution[8].

The number of enquiries grew quickly, not just about membership, but also on more general issues related to learning difficulties. Several schools asked for advice on setting up a remedial centre. By 1970 the DRTAV was receiving a "large number" of telephone enquiries from a variety of sources, including the Psychology and Guidance Branch of the Department of Education, hospitals, private practitioners, the school medical service, psychologists, psychiatrists and parents, most seeking remedial teachers willing to take on private students[9].

By early 1973 the volume of work had grown to the extent that a part-time secretary to work from home was being sought. Permanent premises were also being considered[10]. Ann Wicking was appointed part-time business secretary and an office was established at Glamorgan, Toorak, where Chris Davidson was head of the remedial department[11]. The business secretary handled membership applications and subscription renewals, dispatched journals and books sold by the association, banked cheques, and typed correspondence and the Information Bulletin, thus relieving members of many of the routine duties involved in running the organisation. Much of the extra work came from a rapid growth in membership in the early 1970s.

The Bulletin had begun as an information sheet for members – a single, quarto-size sheet typed on both sides. Its function was primarily to provide news about forthcoming workshops and seminars, events run by other organisations, books available for sale, and membership requirements. By July 1970 it was produced on roneoed foolscap sheets, stapled if necessary, and could run to as many as four pages. It continued to fulfil this function but also broadened considerably in the later 1970s to include more content of practical assistance to teachers in the classroom.

Membership and training

Initially it was agreed that teachers who had completed the course in Diagnostic and Remedial Teaching at the University of Queensland should be accepted for full membership, with consideration of alternative qualifications to be deferred pending finalisation of the constitution. Subsequently the committee agreed to accept courses "similar to the Queensland course", in addition to a minimum of three years teaching experience. In February 1970 the Special Teaching Certificate, which qualified trained teachers in the Victorian Department of Education to teach in special schools for students with disabilities, was accepted as an alternative qualification for full membership[12].

While full members were required to be qualified remedial teachers, associate members represented several professions, including teachers from technical and private schools and the Catholic school system, medical practitioners, educational psychologists, a teacher's college lecturer, a preschool teacher and a music teacher. Early in 1973 there was a further change in the criteria for full membership, requiring teacher registration plus training in a "recognised allied discipline" of remedial education.

Approval of applications for membership became a regular agenda item for executive meetings, and by late 1971 the association had 42 full members, 60 associate members, seven organisational members and two student members. Journal subscribers totalled 340. Between 1972 and 1973, the number of members virtually doubled, from 45 to 91 full members and from 44 to 87 associate members. Over a period of four years there had been a four-fold increase in membership[13].

The increase in membership was gratifying, but the association could only grow and remain viable with continuing recruitment of new members. A major barrier to future growth was the lack of opportunity for teachers to train in remedial work. The remedial teaching course at the University of Queensland had been discontinued, and in 1971 the DRTAV established a sub-committee to consider other training options. Negotiations with Mr R. McWilliam of Mercer House (the independent teacher training institute in Victoria), resulted in a proposal for Mercer House to conduct a two-year, part-time course over one day a week during school terms, provided evidence of support from independent schools was forthcoming. The prerequisite was a Primary Teachers' Certificate and a minimum of five years' classroom teaching experience.

Executive approached independent schools to gauge their support for the proposed course and obtained positive responses from about 20 principals[14]. Support was also sought from SPELD (Specific Learning Difficulties Association of Victoria), and by the end of 1972 the DRTAV president was able to report that there were sufficient applications for enrolment "for it to be viable"[15]. The course, to be known as the Diploma in Remedial Education (Mercer House) would be run by Ian McMillan, an educational psychologist who had undertaken postgraduate studies at the Universities of Alberta, Melbourne and Monash. The qualification requirement for entry became a certificate or diploma from a recognised teachers' college or a university department of education, thus allowing secondary- as well as primary-trained teachers to enrol. In addition, course applicants must be currently employed as teachers for a minimum of three days a week, preferably in a remedial capacity. Content of the course, for which a fee was set of $400, was to include the psychology of learning disabilities and "mental dysfunctions"; theory of remedial teaching and therapy; testing; and case work[16].

By 1973 the course was running successfully and promised "to be an in-depth course culminating in a Diploma of Remedial Teaching"[17]. But despite this initial enthusiasm, by the end of 1973 the future of the course was in doubt[18]; Mercer House was soon to be absorbed into the State College of Victoria at Toorak, putting an end to separate training for teachers in independent schools.

The remedial model and development of a referral service

The DRTAV worked on a diagnostic-remedial model, which assumed that the learning difficulties of many students could be neither diagnosed nor supported in the normal classroom, thus requiring withdrawal of the child from the classroom for one-to-one or small group specialist attention.

There was no lack of support for this model at the time. Class teachers were not trained in remedial techniques, nor did existing frameworks and class sizes allow students with specific learning difficulties to receive the help they needed in the classroom. It was in this context that the Executive decided to set up a referral service which could match individual students to qualified remedial teachers.

For the referral service to be successful, the DRTAV needed to increase awareness of learning difficulties in the wider community. Through the journal and other media the association was becoming more widely known. Links were established with several other organisations, including the International Reading Association (Victorian Chapter) and the Department of Education Reading Centre[19], and an approach was made for recognition by

the Incorporated Association of Registered Teachers of Victoria, an umbrella organisation for registered teachers in independent schools. Publicity received a boost in 1970 when Ormsby Wilkins, whose program "Powerline" on radio station 3AW had received a large number of calls from parents of children with learning difficulties, approached the DRTAV for an interview[20]. By October 1971 the DRTAV was receiving an average of four calls a week seeking remedial teaching for individual children[21]. As the number of requests continued to grow, the consultants' referral service became a central function of the DRTAV and subsequently of AREA.

Not all educators agreed with the remedial model for dealing with learning difficulties. In a provocative article in the association's journal, Jonathon Anderson, professor of education at Flinders University in South Australia, examined the model of remedial education that had evolved in Australia over the past 20 to 25 years (Anderson, 1976). He questioned the effectiveness of this model both in preventing students from dropping out of the education system without adequate literacy skills, and in rehabilitating those who remained. His assertion that the role of the remedial teacher was "indefensible" was made in the light of a recent Schools Commission Report which singled out functional illiteracy as a major factor in social and educational disadvantage.

Equally controversial were Anderson's assertions that the DRTAV had come 20 years too late, that the growth of the remedial education "industry" was not a matter for congratulation, and that his "preference would be for an industry in decline and for remedial teachers and regular teachers to move closer together". Anderson attributed recent growth in remedial education to a number of factors: that students who failed to show progress were no longer required to repeat a grade or encouraged to leave school early; that society no longer had a place for students who had not mastered basic school skills; and that teacher training institutions were not adequately preparing their students to become teachers of reading.

Anderson went on to criticise the remedial teacher concept for implying that, since the child could not apparently learn from normal classroom instruction, there must be "something wrong" with both child and teacher. Remedial teachers were placed in an "impossibly difficult" position, only entering the scene after the child was deemed to have failed and the class teacher had been unable to deal with that failure. Dependence on psychologists or medical practitioners for referrals reinforced the remedial concept. "What other group of workers in the community sets up in parallel a second group to rectify the errors it makes?," Anderson asked (1976, p. 24).

Instead of training more remedial teachers, Anderson proposed that more in-service support should be given to class teachers to develop their teaching skills and their ability to locate and diagnose students' learning problems, as well as identifying skills that students had already mastered. Smaller class sizes would facilitate this role and enable class teachers to spend more time with individual students. Resource teachers could be employed in schools – perhaps an alternative role for remedial teachers – but responsibility for all students' learning should rest with the class teacher.

It is to their credit that the association was prepared to publish this criticism. In a later reference to Anderson's article, Davidson (1979) commented that:

> the point of view expressed in this article, and shared by most administrators, has done nothing to improve the remedial teacher's temporary or stop-gap status... If the remedial teaching of the future is to be done by the classroom teacher, class numbers will have to be reduced, teacher training will have to be drastically improved and much more time devoted to the reading process. (p. 7)

Like Anderson, though, Davidson admitted that he also hoped "that education would progress to the point where our 'industry' became a self-destructive one".

The Psychological Practices Act

An assumption of the diagnostic-remedial model was that learning difficulties could be "diagnosed" with the use of appropriate ability tests, and "remediated" by focusing on weaknesses identified by the tests. Simple solutions were sought to reading failure, with a tendency to latch on to published tests and remedial programs that offered, if not a cure, then at least a chance of improvement. Many remedial teachers therefore saw access to a range of diagnostic tests as a crucial element of their practice. Graduates of the certificate course at the University of Queensland had received training in the use of the 1960 edition of the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test, and believed that the strict qualifications requirements for full membership of the DRTAV entitled members to access to this and similar tests.

Problems of visual perception and visual-motor co-ordination were also gaining attention as possible sources of reading difficulty, and the test of visual-motor development and related remedial program published by Dr Marianne Frostig in the United States were of considerable interest to remedial teachers. Dr Frostig visited Australia in 1968 for a five-day Dyslexia Symposium in Melbourne, and visited again in December 1972 when the DRTAV included her in a successful one-day seminar at Mercer House[22]. Frostig's visits added fuel to demands by remedial teachers for access to

psychological tests, and provoked a challenge to existing interpretations of the *Victorian Psychological Practices Act 1965*.

The Act was the first to legislate the practice of psychology in Australia and had come into force primarily to prevent the charging of fees for dubious testing practices by the Scientology organisation following several complaints. The Act restricted the use of certain prescribed tests to registered psychologists, but provided exemptions from the restriction for testing conducted by teachers and ministers of religion in the course of their work. At the time the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), as agent for several overseas test publishers, had a virtual monopoly on the supply of psychological tests in Australia, and the Victorian Psychological Council (VPC) was guided by ACER restrictions in compiling their list of prescribed tests. Despite exemptions from the Act, ACER considered that individual ability and diagnostic tests, because of their clinical nature and required background knowledge, should only be supplied to psychologists.

The issue came to a head in 1973 when Scientology declared itself a religion, and therefore exempt from restrictions under the *Psychological Practices Act*. The DRTAV Council asked Chris Davidson to approach the DRTAV solicitor for clarification, and if appropriate to place a trial order for psychological tests with ACER. The solicitor agreed to investigate the legality of ACER refusing to supply DRTAV members with certain tests[23]. The Council then decided to recommend that six restricted tests be released by ACER for sale to members of DRTAV (which had by then changed its name to AREA). Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting recorded that the following were cogent factors for the release of the above tests:

1. They were needed for our diagnostic work.
2. Under the *Psychological Practices Act* we are entitled to use these tests, and many of us are in fact using some or all of them.
3. It is possible to learn more from the administration of a test than from a referral. It was emphasised that we are not attempting to take over the role of the psychologist, we are attempting to work within a multidisciplinary framework.
4. As a last resort, we would have no objection for any member of the APS [Australian Psychological Society] to determine whether or not a member of AREA is competent... in the administration of a given test.[24]

The solicitor's advice confirmed that remedial teachers were not contravening the *Psychological Practices Act* if they used psychological tests while working in schools, but that they could not force ACER to sell tests to them.

This advice would be confirmed some years later by the VPC, but the VPC also indicated that "irrespective of training undertaken by remedial teachers in the use of certain psychological tests, the teachers are prevented under the terms of the Act from using these tests for fee or reward in practice outside the normal school situation".[25]

In a further bid to resolve the issue a meeting was arranged between AREA and ACER. The meeting appeared to be positive: "They [ACER] are sympathetic and the general feeling was that when there is a course available where students can receive practice in administering these tests then the tests will be released"[26].

AREA was asked to submit details of membership requirements to ACER.

Over the following years the use of restricted tests by remedial teachers and the development of suitable training courses continued to occupy Council meetings. During 1974 AREA worked with ACER and with psychologist Dr N. Cox to develop appropriate course content[27]. As graduate courses in special education began to include content on assessment, ACER modified its policy on supply to remedial and special education graduates of some individual tests that had previously been supplied only to psychologists. These included tests of auditory and visual perception and some language tests, but not individual tests of intelligence. For AREA, although many tests remained restricted, it was seen as a "breakthrough" (Keir, 1976).

Relations with other organisations and professions

Teachers were not the only profession concerned with learning difficulties, and from the beginning the DRTAV recognised the benefits of good relationships with other organisations and professions. Foremost among organisations with which they shared common ground was SPELD (Specific Learning Difficulties Association).

Formed in 1968, SPELD shared with the DRTAV the aim of educating the public about specific learning difficulties and, through political pressure on governments, achieving recognition of the problem and appropriate educational provision (Davidson, 1979). Membership of SPELD, however, included parents as well as teachers, and a major focus of SPELD was the right of parents to receive adequate information from schools about their children's difficulties. SPELD encouraged parents to be assertive, but not aggressive, in seeking both information and support for their children. SPELD also provided assistance for adults with

reading difficulties. Some SPELD branches had become referral agencies; others offered assessment and classes themselves at a central location. In 1970 the various state branches formed the Australian Federation of SPELD Associations (AUSPELD) to strengthen their political power, while retaining autonomy at state level (Stewart, 1982).

Over the years the DRTAV (and its successors) would co-operate with SPELD on several issues, particularly when the strength of two organisations was seen as being more effective than one, such as in writing submissions and organising workshops, seminars and conferences. In 1975 the DRTAV Council agreed that AREA should become a corporate member of SPELD, and AREA was later represented on the SPELD Management Committee[28].

Although teachers faced the day-to-day challenges presented by learning difficulties, the DRTAV was also aware that remedial consultants would benefit by contacts with other professions, including psychology, medicine, speech and occupational therapy, and optometry, especially as sources of referrals. The medical role was perceived as important in identifying possible physical causes of learning difficulties[29], and would be given due recognition in future issues of the association's journal. A meeting of "allied disciplines" held at Rossbourne House in mid-1973 was attended by 14 people and judged to be "worth continuing", the Executive agreeing that the DRTAV should be an "outlet" for a multidisciplinary group. The president's report for 1972-73 noted that the group was planning seminars and other activities "employing a multidisciplinary approach to the learning process and learning difficulties"[30]. Full membership of DRTAV, though, remained restricted to qualified remedial teachers.

Lobbying was another important activity. Although its primary concern was with students who were underachieving, the DRTAV did not hesitate to become involved in more general issues if it saw an opportunity to promote the cause of remedial education. In a submission to a Ministerial Committee of Enquiry into Special Education in Victoria (Diagnostic and Remedial Teachers' Association of Victoria, 1973), Council made clear the association's concern with "the intelligent underachiever". Such students were defined as having "a lag of at least 18 months behind their chronological ages in language development", likely to display one or more of a range of characteristics, and having in common a label of "school failure". The submission recommended that the government should employ at least one permanent remedial teacher for every 300 children, and that there should be one educational psychologist available to carry out assessments for between one and five of the remedial

teachers employed. It further recommended that three-year teacher training courses for primary teachers should include at least 50 hours on recognising and dealing with specific learning difficulties in the classroom. Systematic screening of children on entry to school was also seen as desirable to avoid a culture of failure as the child progressed through school. The submission fell short of estimating the costs of its proposals, but it was an important first step in putting the case for remedial education before government.

Workshops and seminars provided another avenue for reaching beyond the membership. The DRTAV believed it had a responsibility to foster awareness of learning difficulties generally, and once the association was established the provision of educational activities for practising teachers became a central part of its activities. The first seminar was held in 1968 at Mount Scopus College, Burwood, with keynote speaker Dr Rickard, Director of the Department of Psychiatry at the Royal Children's Hospital[31]. Proposals for talks and seminars prompted lots of discussion and included outside speakers, a professional panel, workshops, demonstrations of teaching aids, technical developments, and meetings either of general interest or on specific topics. An ambitious one-day seminar on the Frostig Visual-Perceptual program, covering "ability training" with a focus on visual perception, child development, psycho-educational evaluation and programming, and teaching reading to children with learning difficulties also helped to put the DRTAV on the map for teachers, while a film and discussion meeting in February 1972 attracted over 100 members of the association and the public[32].

The journal

There is no doubt that the journal helped to get the DRTAV off the ground and established remedial education as a force, not only in education generally, but well beyond. By publishing and circulating a journal the association hoped to reach, as well as DRTAV members, "other disciplines also interested in this field and also parents" as a means of achieving recognition for the work of remedial teachers. Chris Davidson became editor of the journal from its first issue in 1969, remaining editor until 2005, long after his retirement.

Volume 1 No 1 appeared in May 1969. Called simply *Remedial Education*, the journal set out to give teachers practical solutions to learning problems in the classroom, and information on research, books and equipment that could assist in the management of children with learning difficulties. The first issue ran to 250 copies. By popular demand, it was reprinted and 500 copies

of the two succeeding editions were produced. The journal had rapidly become the association's major form of communication "to all levels of professionals and interested parents" and was described by the editor as the "mainstay of the Association"[33].

Volunteer labour and the support of other organisations helped. At first copies were reproduced from Gestetner stencils and collated at Glamorgan, the task vividly recalled by Geoff Saunders (1975):

> The memories of those early days – the inky, black, chewing, spewing machine that consumed our time and meagre capital to produce the pages of those early editions; the Council members plus the children of Glamorgan, whose education was extended by the numbing experience of collating and stapling those thousands of pages... the slow, budget-watching process from amateur production to the professional edition of today. (p. 2)

The time spent duplicating, collating and stapling soon became excessive and a more efficient means of production was needed. Publishers were showing interest in a journal with a more professional finish, and an order was placed with Jenkin Buxton and Co. "for 1000 copies of a 36 page edition with photographs"[34]. Davidson wrote to professors in most Australian universities asking them to encourage staff to contribute, solicited papers from overseas contacts, and sought assistance in reviewing books, keeping records, and dealing with contributions. Meryl Silver agreed to act as Reviews Editor, a position which she retained until 1975 when Mim Davidson took over.

The journal was produced three times a year until 1972, when it changed to four. The title *Remedial Education* duplicated that of an English publication, and in March 1973 Volume 5 Number 1 appeared with the title *Australian Journal of Remedial Education*, reflecting the fact that the journal was now established nationally. Jeff Prentice, as business manager, was responsible for collecting advertising, arranging printing, and distributing to local and interstate shops as well as collecting subscriptions from schools and colleges.

The intention was that the journal should have a practical bias, "and should be used to educate the Australian community towards a better understanding of the work of the remedial teacher with the intelligent underachiever" (Davidson, 1974, p. 2). Issues often adopted a specific theme, for example the medical perspective on learning difficulties, the role of counselling in the school context, mathematics programs, or behavioural problems. Contributions dealing with reading difficulties, though, were most frequent.

The journal also set out to provide a much-needed forum for debate on remedial education practices.

Reflecting on editorial policy over the first 25 years, Davidson and Weigall (1991) would later write:

> The journal has a policy of being open-minded to new ideas... We have published controversial issues or fringe approaches for the interest of our readers, in the hope that there may be a new line of understanding in our work... knowing that they do not necessarily express the views of AREA, but feel that unless we have an open forum for discussing new ideas, there is very little point in producing this journal.
>
> The Editors support properly conducted research procedures and are aware of the importance of maintaining high professional standards. However, we owe it to children to be informed of new ideas to ensure that they have every possible chance to achieve their potential. There is no doubt in our minds that without the stimulus of relatively untried ideas, little progress will be made in our understanding of the learning process. (p. 2)

No issue provides a better example of this policy than the Doman-Delacato program for "treating" learning difficulties. Because it was a highly controversial program that occupied both contributors and readers of the journal over the early years, it is worth discussing some of the relevant contributions more fully.

The program, founded at the Institute for Achievement of Human Potential, Philadelphia, USA, was based on a theory that learning difficulties had their origin in poorly developed neurological organisation resulting from lack of progress through the "normal" phases of development that reflected established hemispheric dominance and laterality, such as crawling and hand dominance. The "treatment", which involved a strict, time-consuming exercise regime, was promoted in Australia by an organisation known as ANSUA (A New Start for the Underachiever). Dr Carl H. Delacato, director of the US organisation, visited Australia in April 1972. A great deal of interest was generated by a talk-back program conducted on Radio 3DB in February 1972 with Graham Forbes, who ran a remedial clinic in Adelaide. As a result Forbes had agreed to address parents and teachers on the subject of "Positive help for children with learning difficulties" as an introduction to Dr Delacato's lecture tour[35].

Prominent among critics of the program was Charlton (1972a), a South Australian educational psychologist who pointed out "the dangers of over-simplifying diagnosis and remediation of the bewilderingly complex medley of learning disabilities which our schools present". In a review of a recent book by Delacato, Charlton (1972b) was equally scathing for the book's emphasis on self-promotion, its simplistic treatment of diagnosis and parent-run therapy, its dismissal of qualified teachers

and psychologists, and its inadequate and misleading presentation of "data".

In the following issue Charlton (1973) wrote a more detailed critique based on several studies published in refereed journals which found no relationship either between failure to establish single-hemisphere brain dominance and reading difficulty (as Delacato's theory claimed), or between laterality and reading or other areas of academic achievement. While concluding that "no scientifically respectable proof [of results claimed by Delacato] has yet appeared", and acknowledging that this did not preclude such proof emerging in the future, Charlton pointed out several more disturbing features of the Delacato program. These included the pressure on parents to commit to an unproven technique, potential guilt feelings if they delayed "treatment", and "the dangerous inflation of parental hopes"; the rigidity of the program which involved proscription of "some natural and enjoyable activities, such as long walks or listening to music"; and last but by no means least, the "virulent denouncing of other forms of remedial diagnosis and treatment" which would induce many parents to refuse potentially valuable help "to follow out a rigid, expensive and potentially harmful wild goose chase".

Not surprisingly, not all readers accepted Charlton's view. Another correspondent (Williams, 1972) wrote in defence of Delacato, claiming personal knowledge of at least 15 case histories of children in Victoria who had shown "marked improvement" in both classroom performance and behaviour. The debate would continue over a number of issues of the journal, provoking some lively discussion and leading one reader (White, 1973) to write: "What I liked most [about the previous issue] was that some articles were excellent (to me), while others irritated me for various reasons, but all were stimulating and interesting, and clearly written by people who are intensely involved."

Conclusion

Much had been achieved during the time of the DRTAV. In just eight years the association had initiated a two-year part-time course for training remedial teachers at Mercer House, established the journal as a recognised quarterly publication, provided a free referral service for students in need of qualified remedial teachers and a free advisory service for people seeking information on remedial education, made a submission to the Victorian Government on special education, and organised lectures, seminars and workshops for teachers and the general public (Davidson, 1974).

The number of enquiries was growing, not just about membership, but also on more general issues related to learning difficulties as well as from schools seeking advice on setting up a remedial centre. The association had also acquired a number of publications for sale, and Council considered the possibility of opening a shop[36]. "It is gratifying to note the tremendous upsurge in interest by educationalists in the field of remedial education in the last year or so," Chris Davidson wrote (1974). With a stable and recognisable identity, the DRTAV could now look towards expanding its activities Australia-wide to form a national body that would carry more weight in approaches to government authorities.

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A history of Learning Difficulties Australia: part two – a national identity

Josephine C. Jenkinson

Abstract

Part Two in this series of articles on the history of Learning Difficulties Australia traces efforts by the Australian Remedial Education Association (AREA) to establish a national identity, from the early 1970s to the early 1980s when significant changes in special education policy were beginning to take effect. For AREA it was a very active time, as membership grew rapidly and the association sought to provide a variety of services and support for its members through workshops, seminars, conferences and publications, established a successful referral service for qualified remedial consultants, and through lobbying and government submissions achieved recognition as the peak professional body concerned with learning difficulties.

The Australian Remedial Education Association

By the early 1970s the Diagnostic and Remedial Teachers Association of Victoria (DRTAV) had become an established organisation, and it was time to consider expanding nationally as a means of strengthening its influence as a lobby group on behalf of students with learning disabilities and their teachers. The decision to go national, however, was met with a mixed reception from around the country.

At its April 1973 meeting the DRTAV Council agreed to ask the association's solicitor, Alwyn Samuel, to draft a model for a national association, and at an Extraordinary General Meeting on 20 September 1973, members voted to accept the model and change the name of the DRTAV to the Australian Remedial Education Association (Victorian Branch). The agreement allowed each state branch to retain its separate constitution and identity and proposed that the national office of AREA should be rotated every two years around state branches, beginning with Victoria. The *Australian Journal of Remedial Education* would become the official journal of AREA, with each state nominating two members to the Editorial Board[1].

The first step was to contact remedial teachers in other states. Encouraged by a visit to Sydney by Victorian members, the New South Wales Remedial Teachers Association replied that they would be "delighted" to join AREA and returned a signed agreement, tabled by Council on 26 February 1974. Queensland, on the other hand, declined membership of the national association on the grounds that membership criteria were "too lax"[2]: the Remedial Teachers' Association of Queensland, like the Victorian association, required teacher registration for full membership and "an additional qualification in diagnostic and remedial techniques from an approved

university or college of advanced education". New South Wales and South Australia, however, accepted teacher training for membership without specifying additional qualifications (Davidson, 1979). It would be many years before Queensland would consider becoming a part of AREA.

A reply offering to promote a Remedial Teachers Association in Western Australia was received and at a meeting on 13 August 1973 the Council asked Anne Bishop to discuss the possibility of a branch in that state on a visit to Perth. In 1975, however, the WA group, the Society for the Advancement of Exceptional Children, was absorbed by the WA Association of Special Teachers and there was no longer an active group in Western Australia which could affiliate with AREA. Interest was renewed in 1980 when John Munro was contacted by a teacher wanting to start a branch of AREA in Western Australia, and copies of the *Bulletin* and a copy of the constitution were sent[3].

A Tasmanian branch was established in early 1976 but a letter in 1981 from "a person interested in forming a Tasmanian branch of AREA" suggested that it, too, had not been active[4]. Almost a year later contact was established with the Tasmanian Association for Teachers of Exceptional Children, which was described as "loosely similar" to AREA, and included teachers from special schools[5].

A South Australian branch also held its first meeting early in 1976 and in 1977 the Branch constitution was tabled at an AREA Council meeting[6]. Peter Westwood, however, questions the existence of a South Australian branch of AREA in the late 1970s or early 1980s, describing any link with the Victorian association as at best "a loose affiliation":

In 1980 (or 1981) a tentative move was made by the association in Victoria to have a branch or chapter

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established in South Australia. A speaker from Melbourne (I think Jeff Prentice) came to Adelaide... and addressed a group of interested individuals... No decision regarding the formation of a South Australian Branch was made at the meeting... A small working group... established to explore possibilities... expressed some reservations about creating a local branch of an association that appeared to be entirely "owned and operated" by people in Victoria, offering no real benefits to potential members in South Australia, other than the journal – or that is how it was perceived. So, it was decided that a separate association would be formed in SA, with its own officers, its own bulletin or newsletter, and its own program of in-service conferences and seminars for educators. In (or about) 1981 the Adaptive and Remedial Education Association (AREA) was established. Between 1981 and 1986 this association organised a number of highly successful conferences and seminars, usually held at the Magill Campus of the South Australian College of Advanced Education. The association also produced a quarterly newsletter/bulletin, and copies were always sent for information to the association in Victoria. Indeed, a number of items (short articles) from the SA newsletter were published again in the *Australian Journal of Remedial Education* during 1981-1986 (Westwood, 2005).

The concern about Victorian "ownership" appears to have been unfounded, however, since Council had previously discussed the issue of branch status and agreed that branches of AREA should remain autonomous.

The Adaptive and Remedial Education Association (SA) was dissolved on 31 March 1987. By mid-1982 the New South Wales Branch was also reported to be "defunct" and the Council resolved to find out whether other, similar associations existed in that state[8].

The difficulty of holding a national body together, given the different state education systems and membership requirements, seemed almost insurmountable, but did not preclude the development of less formal links between remedial educators around Australia. Following early setbacks, in a reference to the forthcoming conference Davidson and Weigall (1975, p. 2) called for unity among groups interested in remedial education, urging them to "forget their petty jealousies and rivalries and seek out the best and finest so that all may benefit". Despite numerous changes in national affiliations over the years and the continuing location of central administration in Melbourne, the association was greatly enriched by interstate contacts, exchanges of information, appointment of interstate council members, conferences, and regular journal contributions from other states.

Some of the most successful national links were forged through annual conferences, which provided an opportunity for groups involved in learning disabilities, including parents, teachers and remedial specialists, to get together and discuss matters of mutual interest. The first conference, held in Melbourne with guest speakers Dr John McLeod from Canada, and Dr Marie Clay from New Zealand, was described as "a huge success", a subsequent bulletin referring to the "enthusiasm and wealth of information which permeated the atmosphere for the whole weekend"[9]. Although Melbourne continued to be the venue for most early conferences, the third, held in 1977 at Kuring-gai College of Advanced Education in Sydney, helped to reinforce links between New South Wales and Victoria, with fifty Melbourne participants travelling to Sydney by bus. The chosen theme, "Reading – the Child and the Teacher: the Remedial Teacher's Role", was clearly of wide interest[10].

Conferences were also an opportunity to examine changing roles and practices in remedial education from the perspectives of teachers, parents, educational administrators, and paramedical professionals. An example was the Fifth National Conference, held in 1981 at Melbourne State College, which adopted the theme of "Catering for the low achiever in the eighties", and included a public lecture and professional speakers. Participation in discussion groups was an important feature of this conference, providing further opportunities for links to be forged between participants from different states[11].

Membership and training

A continuing growth in membership was vital if the association was to survive. New members were needed to help pay for the increasing costs of the journal and other activities, which had led to cuts in office hours to save money. Potential areas of growth included remedial education at secondary level, screening for at-risk children, and increasing involvement in in-service education. The incoming president in 1976, Anne Bishop, favoured AREA remaining primarily an association for qualified remedial teachers, while maintaining close liaison with other professional associations with similar goals[12].

In 1980 a new category of Remedial Education Consultant was introduced, and membership criteria, taking effect from the 1980 AGM, were set as follows: Remedial Consultants to have completed a one-year full-time recognised special education course, including supervised practice such as that required for a Graduate Diploma of Special Education; Members to have evidence of teacher training and acceptable experience in special education; and Associate Members to be professionals who did not necessarily have teacher

training but who worked with students with disabilities[13]. Associate Members could thus include professionals such as psychologists, optometrists, medical practitioners, speech pathologists, and others who may need to deal with learning difficulties as part of their normal day-to-day work. The Council retained the right to vary these requirements in special cases.

AREA was becoming more active in putting forward its views on training in special education. Involvement in academic courses reflected a determination to ensure that remedial teachers continued to receive appropriate training as a necessary requirement for the association's growth, as well as AREA's growing reputation as the peak professional body in the field of learning difficulties. A particular concern was that special education should not suffer as course committees became preoccupied with college amalgamations.

Fewer students were enrolling in special education courses, and in 1980, when the Victorian State Government announced a drop in the number of students to be admitted to special education at Melbourne State College, AREA Council sent a letter of protest to the Minister of Education[14]. The association sought representation on the special education course and offered assistance in the planning of the Bachelor of Education at State College of Victoria (SCV) Burwood, and in the Graduate Diploma in Learning Difficulties at SCV Rusden, while a submission to a course committee at SCV Melbourne recommended a course with a high practical component[15]. As the number of teachers enrolled in special education continued to drop, Council decided to write to unions and parent organisations inviting them to attend a meeting of interested people so that agreement could be reached on priorities and a united front presented on special education issues[16].

Early in 1982 the Council wrote to teacher training institutes with post-graduate courses in special or remedial education to obtain information on the number of special education teachers working in the field and recent cut-backs. Letters were also sent to Assistant Minister for Education Mr Lacy, requesting statistics on teachers granted full- or part-time study leave to complete the Graduate Diploma in Special Education, and to Mr Fordham (Minister for Education) regarding cut-backs. AREA also approached SPELD and the Special Teachers Association regarding the possibility of a joint submission on matters of mutual interest, including the number of teachers undergoing training in special education, the staffing of Special Assistance Resource Centres, and services for learning disabled students in post-primary schools[17].

Concern was also expressed about a new training course. In 1980 the Department of Education introduced the Special Assistance Resource Teacher (SART) program to reverse a growing trend to resort to agencies outside the school for programs to assist students with disabilities and learning difficulties (Wishart, 1983). Under this program, schools which employed a SAR teacher accepted responsibility for co-ordinating specialist services required by the student, which would be used on a consultative basis to support and encourage school initiatives. SAR teachers were given a highly condensed course of training in the Faculty of Special Education at SCV Burwood. A survey by Wishart of 160 teachers who had completed this course found that, despite initial concerns, there was a good deal of support from school principals and teachers for the SART concept. However, most SAR teachers felt they needed more in-service training or further training in special education before they felt competent to fulfil their roles. AREA shared a concern that teachers undertaking SAR duties were not qualified in special education, but their proposals to the course committee were rejected.

Debate proceeded with publication of a further paper intended "to bring about discussion between members of the school team", compiled by a member of the Beaumaris Demonstration Unit (Plummer, 1981). The paper expressed concern about the employment of SAR teachers, which was too often based on an inappropriate model in which teachers received a list of children to be included in special programs, usually identified by standardised testing. Plummer suggested that the model would encourage schools to revert to the medical, or deficit, model that had been popular in the 1960s. She proposed instead that all school personnel should be involved as a team in discussing alternatives open to the SAR teacher, and that this team should decide whether the major emphasis should be on "fitting children to the school or fitting the school to the children". Plummer advocated a developmental or "natural learning" approach in which the teacher "builds into the [classroom] program 'open-ended' situations which have appropriate goals and objectives for children regardless of chronological age". Rather than a single set of activities to suit all children, the developmental model would involve careful planning for the individual child and flexibility in adapting classroom activities. The SAR teacher would be in an ideal position to support the classroom in flexible planning.

Unlike the deficit model, the developmental model was not based on the child's progress in relation to chronological age norms or on "diagnosis" of a learning problem; progress was instead judged against the child's previous performance. Lack of progress was not viewed in terms of the child not fitting the program, but the program not fitting the child. Active learning would occur, Plummer (1981) claimed, when the program was

intrinsically interesting to the child and the child was led to expect success. The resource teacher would enable the class teacher to be the major decision-maker, retaining responsibility for the child.

The SART concept would eventually give way to new policies under the Department of Education integration program. By 1982 SAR teachers were no longer being appointed to primary schools, leaving individual schools to decide whether to appoint a SAR teacher from their staffing allocation. There was no indication of what curriculum and in-service support would be provided for schools conducting a special assistance program, and AREA proposed to send a deputation to the Minister of Education to take up these issues[18].

AREA Referral Service

Despite these changes – or perhaps because of the uncertainty they created – the referral service continued to grow steadily. Most requests for remedial consultants came from teachers and school counsellors, but the Department of Education Psychology and Guidance Branch and other professionals, including psychologists, speech therapists and social workers, were also important sources of referrals[19].

Matching the referred students with available remedial teachers was not always easy, as there was a shortage of consultants in some areas, especially in northern and western suburbs and in rural areas. Draft guidelines for running the referral service were prepared, and to help publicity, a set of aims for AREA was drafted. These aims were firstly, to improve community awareness of underachievement and ways of coping with it; secondly, to provide a resource service for teachers in private practice who were interested in the underachieving child – the service to include training activities and the journal; and thirdly, to foster communication and liaison among all professionals working with underachievers[20].

A document setting out the aims and activities of AREA claimed that each full member of the association worked with an average of 25 children a week, and for consultant members in private practice the referral service was an important source of income. The service was initially run by Anne Bishop until, at the end of 1980, Council decided to run it from the AREA office, appointing a professional sub-committee to facilitate its operation. The draft guidelines were adopted and a list drawn up of consultants' names, addresses, subject areas, ages of children with whom they worked, and their fees. All referral enquiries were to be recorded[21]. By April of the following year about 30 remedial teachers were registered with AREA as consultants, and over two years thousands of schools were contacted with information

about AREA's approach to learning difficulties, its policies, and the services offered[22].

Promoting a withdrawal model was one thing; obtaining official support for the model was another, since by law the Education Department required attendance in the classroom between 9:00 am and 2:00 pm[23]. AREA had already written to support a letter from SPELD to the Department of Education to advocate "the right of the parent to remove the child for specific remedial teaching by a recognised practitioner", and in 1980 agreed to a joint AREA-SPELD deputation to the Department and a letter to the state primary schools[24]. At the 1981 AGM a formal motion was carried "that the association adopts as policy the right of parents to have children released from school for purposes of private tuition". Despite this difficulty the number of requests for referrals continued to grow steadily and the Council agreed to increase their advertising with an entry in the Yellow Pages, and a block advertisement in a local community directory for a trial period[25].

Workshops, seminars and publications

Keeping the membership involved through in-service education, in the form of workshops, seminars and professional visits, was a top priority. Many early activities of the association had included participation in workshops and seminars arranged by other organisations. By 1975 a regular program of monthly guest speakers organised by AREA was under way. A seminar presented by Eddie Keir on "Auditory perceptual problems and how the teacher can help cater for such problems in the classroom" was attended by 90 people. At a broader level Des Pickering spoke on "Specific learning disabilities – fact or fiction" based on a study carried out at the Reading Research and Treatment Centre, while a two-day Language Remediation workshop was planned for July 1975 with speakers Stewart Sykes, Ian MacMillan and Jocelyn Williams, to be concluded with a panel discussion[26]. Funds had already been approved for seminars on children's language problems and remedial maths, the latter attracting 55 participants[27]. Good attendance at seminars and workshops confirmed that AREA was filling a significant gap in training teachers to deal with learning problems.

1976 began with a very active sub-committee planning seminars and arranging speakers. In addition to the planned program, AREA joined with the local branch of the International Reading Association to conduct three successful seminars on reading: "How to help children learn to read", with Professor Marie Clay; "Teaching of reading", with Dr P. Rouch and Mr D. Ryan, and "Teaching of reading and miscue analysis (analysis of

reading errors)", with Professor K. Goodman and Dr Y. Goodman[28]. Following the success of these seminars AREA arranged a more in-depth course on reading and miscue analysis and its application in the classroom, with the aim of introducing participants to miscue procedures as a substitute for standardised tests[29]. Articles on miscue analysis appeared with relative frequency in the *Australian Journal of Remedial Education*. Over the next few years the range of seminar and workshop topics expanded to include a continuing maths seminar, mathematics and language, music workshops, handwriting, testing and the classroom teacher, neurological disorders, sensory integration, and test administration for remedial teachers.

An innovation in autumn 1977 was an open day on a Saturday, held at SCV headquarters at Invergowrie, Hawthorn. This was an informal social occasion, an opportunity for the 80 members present to meet each other over a barbecue lunch and drinks. The program also included a talk on the Reading Development Centre in Adelaide by Glen Crisp, films on language and reading, a videotape on reading by Mona Tobias, and a display of books available from the Special Book Service[30].

Most activities had been addressed to primary teachers, and a sub-committee was convened to implement workshops for secondary teachers. In 1977 John Munro convened a series of workshops for junior secondary teachers on diagnosis and remediation of reading disabilities, focusing on the level of reading comprehension required in various subject areas, and including discussion of department and school organisational structures to facilitate learning experiences[31]. These workshops continued in 1978, and included an extended series on the development of reading and numeracy skills at secondary level held on nine consecutive Thursday evenings[32].

John Munro's Council membership, including presidency for five successive terms, covered a period of ten years from 1975 to 1984. It was a very active time for the association, particularly in extending AREA's focus to learning difficulties in mathematics. In association with Melbourne State College and SPELD, AREA established a Mathematics Learning Centre based at Melbourne State College under Munro's direction. The centre, staffed by psychologists and remedial teachers with expertise in learning difficulties in mathematics, held weekly workshops involving teachers and small groups of children in mathematical learning experiences. In-service workshops for teachers, counselling and guidance for teachers and parents, and a diagnostic service for individual students with a remedial program to suit the child's needs were also available[33].

By the early 1980s computers were beginning to play an important role in education, and a weekend computer workshop was planned for early 1983 as well as a visit later that year to Maralinga Primary School, then the only Victorian primary school with a computer classroom[34]. Indeed, the rapid advance in technology was one of the factors that prompted the AREA Council to review its policies, aims and functions "in-depth" over a number of weeks in 1983, and to examine the roles of specialists, principals, and other authorities "who influence and direct the welfare of the child"[35].

The *Bulletin*, which had originated as an information sheet, was still the main means of communication with members, and in 1976 the association decided to make its appearance more attractive with the addition of a new AREA logo[36]. In 1979 the Council adopted a proposal to publish regular feature articles and to circulate copies to major newspapers. John Munro introduced a question and answer feature to help teachers with practical solutions for children needing extra help in the classroom, which became known as 'Munro's Mailbag'.

There was much of interest to occupy the *Bulletin*, which, by the first issue of Volume 13 in March 1981, had reached 16 pages (four folded foolscap sheets) and included an index. The contents of this issue provide a good example of the variety of information and methods used by AREA to communicate with its members. Two forthcoming workshops were announced: "Establishing a Special Education Unit in a School", and "Language Acquisition in Pre-School Children". Anne Pringle contributed an article summarising the role of the remedial education consultant. Munro's Mailbag responded to several enquiries, including helping the low achiever to organise learning, spelling, teaching tables and division. There was a separate discussion on setting up a school-based mathematics resource centre. The Mona Tobias Award was introduced and there was a call for book reviewers for the journal. A notice alerted readers to a display of teaching aids at the AREA office, and new book titles were listed.

Mona Tobias had been a teacher with the Victorian Department of Education when ill-health forced her out of the classroom and into the Department's Correspondence School. Here she came into contact with students who had contracted poliomyelitis in the late 1930s, inspiring her to devote the remainder of her career to working with students with disabilities. She lectured at Toorak and Melbourne Teachers Colleges and at the Lincoln Institute, donating her lecture fees to SPELD, and was closely associated with SPELD after her retirement. She died in 1980 at the age of 74. Obituaries described her as a gifted teacher who was open to new ideas and who gave generously of her time, to children, to those who taught them, and to parents. To Mona Tobias was credited

the pioneering of individualised instruction in Victoria to meet the specific needs of each child (Larsen, 1983; Nottle, 1997).

In recognition of the work of Mona Tobias, the Victorian Branch Council of AREA decided to introduce a special award to a person who had made a significant contribution to remedial or special education. The inaugural award was made in 1981 to Anne Keir, a former lecturer in special education at Melbourne State College, for her work in auditory perception. At the presentation AREA president, John Munro, spoke of Anne Keir's "ability in language and reading skills, communicating information, ability to relate to children, cognitive development of language, learning disorders, and ways of coping with them". The 1982 award was made to Alwyn Samuel, the association's solicitor[37].

Submissions and lobbying

Submissions to government inquiries continued to be an important function of AREA in promoting the cause of learning difficulties. In 1974 the Federal Government announced it was setting up a House of Representatives Select Committee on Specific Learning Difficulties. A submission to the Committee prepared by AREA began by outlining the history, aims and role of the association, arguing that "the existence of a voluntary organisation of this nature is evidence as to the existing needs of teachers, educationists, parents and children, and as such is relevant to the terms of reference of the Select Committee" (AREA, undated, 1974 or 1975, p. 2).

The submission stated that, in the experience of AREA members, the incidence of specific learning difficulties as defined by the Select Committee was between 20 and 25 per cent of the school population. Although the growth of AREA and the establishment of remedial centres in many independent schools indicated that teachers were taking positive steps to help alleviate the problem, the association could not cope with the increasingly high demand for its services, and, furthermore, lacked the financial resources to initiate relevant research. The submission pointed out that the success of remedial teaching could not be gauged by the student's return to an academic stream; on the contrary, "success in terms of improvement, acceptance, prevention of secondary problems and the rehabilitation of a potential delinquent must be rated high" (AREA, undated, 1974 or 1975, p. 5).

The submission urged that financial assistance be offered to organisations working in the field of learning difficulties to enable them to expand their services. It recommended improvement in the training of teachers to recognise and treat specific learning disabilities, and an expansion of support services for medical and psychological

referrals. Finally, AREA sought encouragement and financial support for multidisciplinary research at classroom level on identification and treatment of children with specific learning difficulties.

To assist formulation of more specific solutions and recommendations, AREA had sent a questionnaire to members and independent schools on employment of remedial teachers. On 30 April 1975 Anne Keir and Geoff Saunders appeared as witnesses at a hearing by the Select Committee, reporting back to a Council meeting on 5 May 1975: "The Chairman of the Committee, Mr Race Matthews, expressed great interest in our questionnaire and the desire to see the results as soon as possible. They also expressed anxiety about the numbers of unqualified remedial teachers practising at the moment and asked how this affected our association."

Further avenues for expansion and publicity continued to come under consideration. In a letter to the Director of Teacher Education, the Council promoted the association's role in the delivery of in-service education and emphasised the need for AREA to be represented on course committees[38]. A list was compiled of available AREA speakers and topics. At the 1979 AGM a motion was carried that AREA become involved in remedial education in country areas, and there was a discussion on running country seminars and workshops, as well as using the *Bulletin* to disseminate information to rural areas. Members also agreed that AREA should take an active role in communicating the needs of remedial education to state government bodies, and that a letter should be sent to the then-Premier, Mr Hamer, and other party leaders asking how their party intended to fulfil its promise to assist the education of learning disabled children.

Another issue that concerned AREA as changes occurred in assessment and accreditation for school leavers was that of special consideration in assessment for students with learning disabilities. SPELD was invited to join AREA in gathering information on current conditions in examinations for the Higher School Certificate (HSC) and at tertiary level for learning disabled students, with a view to making a submission to the Examinations Board on behalf of these students[39]. AREA was also concerned that schools generally did not make any provision for learning disabled students in examinations.

The work involved in lobbying the Department of Education and other relevant bodies was substantial, and at a meeting on 29 July 1982 Council decided to implement a delegation structure to communicate AREA's operations, policies and expertise to other professionals involved in remedial education. Delegations appointed by the Council would target individuals and groups to discuss ways of improving the lot of learning

disabled students. These targets included the Minister and Shadow Minister of Education, parent bodies, the State Council for Special Education, teacher unions, colleges, and VISEC (Victorian In-service Education Committee). Each deputation was to consist of at least three members of the Council.

In 1982 AREA made a submission to the Ministerial Review of Educational Services for the Disabled in Victoria. The purpose of the submission was to make recommendations for meeting the educational needs of students with learning disabilities and their teachers and parents. These students were defined as the:

> population of pupils who are not as able to benefit from conventional instruction as their class peers and whose lack of ability is not primarily attributable to illness, physical disability, environmental factors, such as absence from school, intellectual retardation, emotional disturbances or sensory impairment. (AREA, 1982, p. 5)

The submission recommended that every teacher should be trained to identify children with learning difficulties, and should be given basic training in theory and practice of reading and mathematics learning.

Although the association's concept of learning disability remained unchanged, the submission did suggest that AREA was beginning to see remedial education in the context of the classroom. Services beyond the school were still seen as necessary, at least for some students, but AREA now believed that an appropriately trained and qualified resource teacher within the school should be the first stage of support for the classroom teacher. The association acknowledged that the volume of requests received by AREA suggested that the kind of diagnosis and support provided by AREA outside the school was not seen as relevant to the classroom context (AREA, 1982, p. 6). The submission further recommended that outcomes of assessment and diagnosis of learning disabilities conducted by specialists

> be much more clearly specified in terms of learning implications... [and] that all diagnosis be oriented towards specifying the skills the child needs to learn and the specific conditions under which education and instruction should be provided, in order to meet his [*sic*] individual learning needs. (AREA, 1982, p. 7)

The submission also urged more formal procedures for granting special consideration in academic assessment. Finally, the association recommended a greater recognition of parents' rights in gaining access to information about their child's progress, and better and more flexible communication between schools and parents.

It was a well-reasoned submission, but as the Ministerial Review turned its attention to integration into the mainstream of students currently in special schools, or at risk of being placed in special schools, the provision of support for students with specific learning difficulties did not have priority. Indeed, recommendations of the review panel included discontinuing such resources as had been available, including the Reading Research and Treatment Centre, Special Assistance Units which had developed out of Opportunity Remedial Centres, and Special Teaching Units in secondary schools. The resources allocated to these facilities were to be diverted to the appointment of integration teachers in regular schools (Collins, 1984). Yet, as Munro observed, the report did not give any attention to the problems of students already learning in the mainstream[40]. Although AREA later acknowledged that "policy development [in the new Education Department Integration Unit] is to include those already experiencing difficulties in the regular school as well as those whose parents may choose to change from a special setting to a regular school environment"[41], specific learning disability was, and is still, not included in disability funding programs in Victoria.

Administration

As the association grew the temporary office at Glamorgan was no longer adequate, and in 1974 AREA signed a two-year lease on office space in rooms 4 and 5 at 703 Burke Road, Camberwell[42]. Within two years AREA had outgrown this space and moved to 825 Burke Road, Camberwell[43]. The new office, run by Diane MacMillan with Ann Wicking continuing as part-time administrative secretary, also provided space for the growing Special Book Service (ASBS). At the end of 1976 office functions were reorganised, with Administrative Secretary and ASBS Manager combined into one half-time position of Executive Officer "requiring both secretarial and accounting skills and experience". Ann Wicking and Diane MacMillan were replaced by June Christiansen, who managed both jobs[44]. Two years later the office moved from Camberwell to 319 High Street, Kew, and the new premises were formally opened by Professor Marie Neale, of Monash University, at an evening function and book sale attended by around 100 members[45].

By 1973 the association had acquired a number of publications for sale and the Council discussed the possibility of opening a shop. The Special Book Service (SBS, later the Australian Special Book Service, ASBS) was established and AREA joined the Booksellers Association, becoming a registered book agent[46]. By mid-1975 operation of the ASBS had become too time-consuming and a sub-committee was established to consider alternative arrangements, including issues of income tax and whether AREA qualified as a non-

profit organisation[47]. The sub-committee was asked to consider three alternatives for ASBS: to be formalised as a commercial enterprise within AREA; to be offered to another organisation with AREA receiving a proportion of the profits; or to close the operation altogether. Council adopted a recommendation that ASBS remain "the exclusive property of AREA as a service function of the association with the constitution amended as advised to conform with the requirements of the Taxation Law regarding non-distribution [to members] of profits". The service would be supervised by AREA's business manager, Jeff Prentice, and accounted separately[48]. Jeff Prentice managed the book service until his resignation in 1977. There would be several changes of management over the next few years.

Profits from ASBS contributed substantially to AREA finances, but financial viability of the association was a continuing problem as AREA strove to meet the needs of its members. A loan of $1000 from SPELD in 1975, promptly repaid within three months, helped the association through one difficult time[49]. But by mid-1977 the financial situation was being described as "precarious" and in 1978 the Treasurer reported a net loss for the year of $1,761[50]. Major expenses were publication of the journal, purchase of stock for the ASBS, followed by secretarial expenses and costs of running seminars. Against these expenses the major sources of income were subscriptions, ASBS sales, and fees charged for attendance at seminars[51]. The major expenses reflected an expansion of activities which would, in turn, raise the profile of AREA and bring increased membership and income, and by 1979 the balance sheet was again back in surplus. Nevertheless, maintaining enthusiasm among the Council members was often difficult, with several meetings during 1978 and 1979 being without a quorum. The constitution was amended in 1981 to adopt a quorum for Council meetings of half the members of council plus one for that year[52].

Conclusion

The late 1970s and early 1980s was an era of greatly increased activity for the Victorian Branch of AREA. The referral service had grown rapidly, and together with other association activities, including workshops and seminars, publications and submissions, made the employment of paid staff and permanent office premises essential. As staff from teacher training institutes began to play a more active role in AREA, Council increased its interest in issues affecting special education generally. Teacher training occupied the attention of the Council as teachers' colleges were affected by amalgamations into new tertiary institutions independent of the State

Department of Education. Moves to create a national association had proved disappointing, but satisfying links were established with other states through conferences and the association's journal. The years that followed would see changing policies and provisions in special education, while AREA would continue to focus on the remedial model and support for remedial teachers.

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A history of Learning Difficulties Australia: part three – the Journal

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Abstract

Part three in this series continues the story of the *Australian Journal of Remedial Education*, which had by the early 1970s become one of the most important – and certainly the most publicly visible – activity of AREA. It concludes in the early 1980s, soon after publication of the 50th issue. During this time the journal expanded its print run to 2000, and distribution was extended to every Australian state and more than 20 overseas countries. It attracted a wide range of articles from within Australia and overseas, becoming more focused on the reading process, but still including a great variety of approaches to the remediation of learning difficulties.

Within a few years of its introduction, the official journal of AREA, the *Australian Journal of Remedial Education* (*AJRE*) had become a lifeline for communicating with members on issues that were central to the diagnosis and management of learning disabilities. The journal filled a gap by providing an Australian educational periodical devoted to learning disabilities and helped to establish AREA as the peak organisation in that field well beyond the association.

Chris Davidson had been the editor of the journal from its beginning, and in June 1975 he acquired a co-editor, Richard Weigall, to share the considerable work-load involved in producing a good quality publication four times a year[1].

The journal was now reaching a much wider readership and by 1975 subscriptions had grown to a point at which Davidson and Weigall could announce a new "streamlined format and presentation"[2]. The hours of volunteer labour operating a messy duplicating machine were long since gone. Such a significant publication required a professional appearance that could only be achieved through a commercial publisher. Jeff Prentice's company, Australian International Press (AIP), had taken on this task[3].

By early 1979 Jeff Prentice was no longer involved with AIP and at the end of that year the Council cancelled their contract with the publishing firm and decided to take on full responsibility for the journal. Jeff Prentice would continue to assist with production and printing on the basis of an annual letter of agreement and an honorarium[4].

Despite the professional appearance of the journal, the *AJRE* was not seen as an academic publication and contributions were not submitted to blind review. Articles ranged from chatty presentations of individual experiences to more serious discussions of issues such as curriculum, teacher training, child abuse, specialist units and how they functioned, and giftedness and learning disadvantage. In addition to articles, there were letters to the editor, verse, cartoons, photographs of conference activities, notices of seminars, and summaries of government reports. In many ways the journal duplicated the *Information Bulletin* by including notices of forthcoming events and conferences, but it reached a much wider readership than the *Bulletin*. If it appeared to lack a single focus, it was never lacking in interest.

By 1978 the journal was celebrating ten years of publication, and a circulation that had risen from 500 at the end of 1969 to close to 1400. Acknowledging this achievement, Jeff Prentice claimed that over the decade there had been "a greater awareness of problems confronting children in our classrooms with a resultant uplift in the standards of remedial teaching". With branches in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia, and another branch expected to be established in 1978, the journal now had a much more national approach than it had at the beginning. Cliff Pacey in Sydney and Peter Westwood in Adelaide, as consultant editors, encouraged articles from members of state branches. In addition, Prentice noted, the journal had published "significant articles from well known, respected people in special and remedial education in Australia and from overseas". Further, it could now boast subscriptions from 25 overseas countries[5].

With Chris Davidson as editor over the first decade, now assisted by Dick Weigall and most recently by Di Bedson, editorial policy had remained unchanged, maintaining a balance between theoretical and practical articles for remedial and classroom teachers. The future of the journal, Prentice continued in his editorial, depended on students now training in special and remedial education. Students must see the journal as being of practical use if it was to survive.

Contributors to early issues of the journal had largely

focused on problems and programs that were believed to be related to the reading process but not a part of it, such as visual or auditory perception, perceptual-motor coordination, and neurological development. The debate about causes and cures for learning difficulties remained unresolved, and when Dick Weigall joined Chris Davidson the editors took the opportunity to reiterate the aims of the journal:

> For six years *Remedial Education* [*sic*] has aimed to serve as a vehicle for new ideas, ideas which will help the child who simply cannot learn in a typical classroom situation. To save you ferreting through numerous journals which teachers would not have access to, we do this for you and reprint those which will be [of] relevance[6].

It was this focus on the needs of teachers that helped to set the journal apart from more academically oriented, refereed journals.

Although the editors were keen to promote discussion on new ideas in remedial education, Davidson and Weigall also had some cautionary words about innovation for its own sake:

> Unfortunately the rules for effective innovation have not been learnt in the sphere of education. The practice of "throwing the baby out with the bath water" has become an only too familiar one. Whether it has been ITA, Look and Say method versus Phonics, Open Plan Schools, Spelling Reform, Creative Writing, to mention only a few of the legion of ideas that have been thrown into the educational arena, the technique has been the same. Whatever is in vogue replaces, so it seems, everything else, with little regard or responsibility for the individual and his specific needs[7].

ITA, or the Initial Teaching Alphabet, was a modified English alphabet which provided a single symbol for each of the 44 main sounds of the English language, thus avoiding ambiguities of spelling-sound correspondences. Devised by Sir James Pitman, ITA became a popular tool for the early teaching of reading in the 1960s, but its popularity did not last (Williams, 1991).

While acknowledging that these innovations might suit some children, Davidson and Weigall warned of the dangers of innovation and experimentation "without the support of what has been tried and proved successful in the past", before accepting new methods and discarding old ones.

The medical contribution

This endeavour to avoid endorsing programs that lacked a sound knowledge base of learning difficulty led to substantial reliance on articles by established professionals and academics whose main role was not in education. Examples were an article on the role of vision in spelling by an optometrist (Woodland, 1975), and a lengthy paper on diagnosing and treating school problems by a paediatrician based in the United States (Kinsbourne, 1975). Although Kinsbourne's claim that "the great bulk of illiteracy in this country derives from socioeconomic diversity and cultural alienation..." was not necessarily helpful to Australian readers, the article contained a great deal of common sense that would help to dispel some of the myths about learning disabilities.

Medical practitioners continued to make a substantial contribution to the journal both through original articles and through reprints from other journals. Generally they provided a sound antidote to any claims that aberrations in neurological development would inevitably lead to learning difficulties. Fearon (1977) discussed the role of the medical practitioner in diagnosis and treatment of learning disabilities, emphasising the role of the doctor in compiling a developmental history, but was cautious about interpreting variations in development: "Departures from normal patterns of motor development and coordination do not indicate a learning difficulty will be present. They do indicate a greater likelihood of that" (Fearon, 1977, p. 21).

In another medical contribution Manson (1977), Director of Neurology at the Adelaide Children's Hospital, discussed the definition, possible causes, diagnosis and remediation of dyslexia. Definitions of dyslexia, according to Manson, emphasised the disparity between a child's intellectual ability and the ability to read, despite normal educational opportunities. Manson excluded psychiatric and socio-economic factors and impairments of ocular movement as having a causal relationship with dyslexia, and pointed out that both dyslexia and incomplete cerebral dominance could be common effects of a developmental defect in the left cerebral hemisphere, rather than one being the direct cause of the other. He also pointed to the lack of neurological evidence that dyslexia was due to a failure to proceed through normal stages of motor development, such as crawling, and noted the absence of any support for programs that required children with a range of disorders, including dyslexia, to be retrained and taken through these stages before they could learn to read.

Manson (1977) argued for a co-operative team approach to assessment and treatment of dyslexia, with the medical practitioner carrying out a complete physical examination to exclude visual and hearing impairments and obvious psychiatric or neurological disorders. An educational psychologist would conduct assessments of intelligence and identify areas of strength and weakness, while class teachers should be thoroughly informed about

the nature and implications of dyslexia. Students should be allowed time out of class for remedial work.

It was an approach that fitted well with AREA's philosophy.

Hopkins (1977), a neurologist at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne, advocated discarding the term "minimal brain dysfunction" because of the difficulty of proving its existence and the unnecessary alarm that use of the term caused parents and teachers. He did, however, acknowledge that some degree of minimal cerebral dysfunction could occur in learning disabilities, even though it could be difficult or impossible to establish.

Causes and cures for learning disabilities

Despite the journal's stated aims, debates about terminology, or even about the causes of learning difficulties, had little that was practical to offer the classroom teacher. Reviewing the debate over the existence and etiology of dyslexia, Western Australian psychologist Margaret White, commented on terminology:

> The controversy which has raged over the term "dyslexia" with unbelievable waste of professional time and energy, has only been in part a controversy over whether we should use a small Greek word meaning "distortion of words" or some three-barrelled euphemism such as "specific learning disability"... (White, 1975, pp. 13-14).

Support for a relationship between sensory-motor problems and reading disability persisted. Problems in visual perception and visual-motor coordination continued to be promoted as a possible cause of reading difficulty, perhaps because both diagnostic tests and remedial programs based on the components of visual perception were readily available and easily implemented (Frostig, 1975). Frostig argued against a unitary view of intelligence as a single cognitive entity, and advocated analysis of children's abilities on the basis of subtest performance on various psychological tests, including tests of intelligence, psycholinguistic abilities, and visual-motor perception.

There was no shortage of criticism of the diagnostic-remedial model (that is, remediation based directly on strengths and weaknesses identified by psychometric testing). An article by Diane Divoky in the New York Times, cited by McLeod (1976), claimed that learning disability was a bandwagon that had got out of control and had reached epidemic proportions. According to Divoky (cited in McLeod, 1976, p. 25), "hyperkinesis, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, mixed dominance, Frostig, Ritalin [a drug commonly prescribed for hyperactivity], and perceptual-motor training are on their way to becoming household words in the suburbs".

McLeod himself had questioned the efficacy of visual perceptual-motor programs in improving reading skills, and, referring to a situation of "attack and counter attack" in the United States, cited further criticisms of auditory-perceptual programs and remediation programs which attempted to teach psycholinguistic skills based on the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities (ITPA).

The ITPA was a norm-referenced test designed to identify strengths and weaknesses in three main components of language processing: receptive (decoding), organising (association) and expressive (encoding). These components were assessed using sub-tests of auditory and visual motor coordination, auditory and visual closure (supplying missing parts in incomplete stimulus material or integrating discrete items into a whole), and auditory and visual sequential memory. The breakdown of language processes into various auditory and visual skills had prompted the development of remedial programs based directly on the structure of the ITPA, but with little evidence that the programs themselves yielded anything other than small improvements on individual sub-test scores.

McLeod (1976) claimed that educators were generally poorly trained in experimental method and therefore ill-equipped to judge research, and that many had lost sight of the original purpose of tests such as the ITPA, which was to serve as a clinical diagnostic instrument, not as a model for the content of remedial programs. McLeod did not go so far as to dismiss the role of remedial programs in helping children with learning difficulties, but he did urge caution in accepting any one program as the answer.

Elkins (1976) entered the debate arguing that the problem with using a diagnostic-prescriptive model of remediation was that diagnosis depended on the technical adequacy (reliability and validity) of the method used. Rather than dismiss the use of such tests, however, Elkins suggested that use of the ITPA may enable the teacher "to gain some insight into the child's language... as an important outward sign of cognitive development" (p. 15). While the efficacy of teaching based directly on test results had not gained clear research support, Elkins concluded that there could be no substitute for careful monitoring of actions and decisions in the classroom, and modifying teaching on the basis of observed results.

Similarly, the Wepman Auditory Discrimination test was dismissed by Cameron (1979). Cameron's study demonstrated a lack of validity of the Wepman test for identifying children with problems in auditory discrimination, and also failed to demonstrate any causal link between problems in auditory discrimination and reading difficulty.

The diagnostic-prescriptive model would come under

fire again in 1983 when a correspondent, John Truran, responded to an article by John Munro on "Diagnosis in maths". Pointing out that many primary teachers do not have sufficient expertise in maths to follow detailed diagnostic prescriptions in this area, Truran cautioned that over-emphasis on diagnosis and prescription could be unwise, pointing out that indications of what children could do were far more reliable than indications of what they could not do.

The reading process

Despite the editors' concerns with "fads", evidence was emerging of greater attention by contributors to the reading process itself. The importance of understanding the reading process was emphasised by Saunders (1973) in a review of a book by New Zealand reading expert, Marie Clay, *Reading: the Patterning of Complex Behaviour*. Clay was interested in the processes involved in beginning reading, particularly the child's concept of print, which, Clay argued, was a prerequisite to the child's understanding of the reading process. Saunders recognised the value of this approach for the remedial teacher:

> The philosophy of analysing the reading process, then analysing the child's performance in terms of skills gained or needing reinforcement, is one that should assist both the class teacher and the remedial teacher in the search for a practical approach to the reading problem. (1973, p. 26)

Growing familiarity with computers was channelling theories of cognition towards a view of the human brain as a processor of information. Several researchers began to extend this analogy to the reading process. Papers that took an information processing perspective of reading were generally more academic; they reviewed current literature and outlined experiments to support their theories.

Parmenter (1977) distinguished two traditional approaches to the study of children with reading difficulties: one – the etiological approach – sought solutions by studying the causes of reading difficulty; the other attempted to find the single "best" method of teaching reading – whether through phonics, sight words, whole sentences, or linguistics. A third, more recent approach, was to identify salient characteristics of the learner and attempt to match them to specific teaching strategies. None of these approaches, according to Parmenter, was clearly supported by evidence. Parmenter proposed an information processing model in which three components – inputs, process, and products or outputs – could be integrated into a single systems approach to the teaching of reading. A series of controlled single-

subject experiments with multiple baselines, followed by an experiment with four subjects, demonstrated the effects of intervention based on this approach.

Stanley (1977) also used an information processing perspective to present a more detailed treatment of relationships between visual perception and reading. Stanley described a series of experiments in which the processing of visual information was broken down into several stages. His analysis of these stages demonstrated that children with a specific reading disability do not usually have a generalised perceptual problem. Nor do they appear to have a problem in short-term storage of visual information. Rather, the problem lies in the stage of encoding information into short-term memory, apparently due to a maturational lag in short-term memory capacity.

Miscue analysis

Another approach to understanding the processes involved in reading was that of miscue analysis, a technique for diagnosing reading problems through an analysis of errors made in oral reading, devised by Goodman and Goodman (1977). Miscue analysis had become very popular when the Goodmans visited Australia in 1976 to present workshops for AREA. The basis of the technique is that information can be gleaned about the child's approach to the decoding process from the types of errors, or miscues, he or she makes in oral reading, depending, for example, on whether the miscues consist of substitutions or omissions, have a similar sound to the original word, make semantic, grammatical or contextual sense, or indicate a letter by letter approach rather than an attempt to blend sounds.

Exactly what the processes involved in reading were, and which aspects of reading remedial programs should focus on, remained matters for debate. In a thought-provoking article, Dilena (1979) reminded readers that reading difficulties went far beyond the problem of translating written symbols into speech, because printed text as usually found in books was not simply "speech written down". In printed text cues to meaning such as the speaker's facial expression are absent. On the other hand, signals, such as punctuation, paragraphs and "pointer" words, such as "however", "nevertheless", and "but", which indicate the direction the text is taking, make written text more organised and structured than speech. Dilena suggested that teachers could help by explaining to students how writers organise text in this way, and focus on getting the meaning of written language rather than concentrating on getting every word correct.

Continuing the debate, Cameron (1980) claimed that the two major approaches to teaching reading,

phonics and whole word, were based on behaviourist theory, an approach that had been discarded in favour of a cognitive approach to reading. The cognitive approach encouraged use of contextual clues and did not insist on total accuracy in reading. Cameron defended Goodman's model of reading, in which the skilled reader used contextual information to predict words and could self-correct reading errors if they did not appear to make sense in the context. Miscue analysis could be used to identify children who did not apply these cognitive skills, evident, for example, when the child reads a nonsense word instead of the correct word, or fails to indicate that a misread word does not fit the context.

Few writers had considered the impact of children's feelings about the reading process. Johnson (1980) argued that attitudes to reading were "of serious concern", and that early failure in reading may be related to negative attitudes which in turn discouraged further efforts at reading. Maintaining that attitude assessment, combined with assessment of cognitive reading skills using miscue analysis, would give a more complete picture of a child's reading problem, Johnson developed an interview technique to explore the child's attitudes. This technique could be used, not only to find out how the child felt about reading, but also to identify the reasons behind those feelings.

The teaching of reading

More general issues relating to the teaching of reading also received prominence in the journal. Concerns that reading difficulties were not being dealt with effectively at primary level prompted discussion about longer term implications. The last two issues of 1974 focused on the child with learning difficulties in the secondary school. Reading failure at secondary level became a recurring issue, not the least of the problems being the effect it had on a student's self-concept (Leber, 1977).

By the late 1970s, following a wide testing project by the Australian Council for Educational Research commissioned by the Federal Government, concerns were starting to emerge about education in basic skills. Closing the AREA National Conference in 1979, prominent Labor politician Race Matthews stated:

> ...the problem of underachievement in Australian schools does not arise from a shortage of explanations, answers or techniques. It is a product of the shortage of the will and the resources which are needed to translate explanations into actions, and to give effect to answers and techniques. (Matthews, 1979, p. 4)

Teacher training also received its share of the blame. The principal of the Reading Development Centre in the South Australian Department of Education criticised the current teacher training curriculum which focused on a liberal education of teachers at the expense of developing competence in helping children to acquire basic literacy skills (Caust, 1976). Caust advocated a more supportive role for remedial teachers in schools, enabling classroom teachers to become more competent in the teaching of reading so that only the most severely reading disabled students would need to be withdrawn for work in a "clinical" setting.

Concern for the training of specialist remedial teachers was also still evident. Edwards (1976) discussed guidelines for reading specialists established by the Professional Standards and Ethics Committee of the International Reading Association. The recommended training included graduate courses in the foundations of reading, diagnosis and correction of reading disabilities, a clinical or laboratory practicum in reading, and courses in general psychology, child psychology, measurement and evaluation, and literature for children and adolescents. Edwards suggested that education authorities in Australia should reassess the requirements for remedial teachers and begin planning courses along these lines.

Still governments remained unconvinced about the seriousness of reading and other specific learning difficulties. In an editorial in the journal Davidson (1980) discussed a report of a Ministerial Committee on Special Assistance Programs in Victoria. He described the report as "depressing", noting that the single statement included in the report relating to specific learning difficulty had found this issue to be "difficult of resolution". The report opposed "any splintering of educational services on the basis of an assumption of failure in children's learning". While Davidson conceded that the term "specific learning difficulty" was probably too broad to suggest specific solutions, he pointed out that the problem was still there.

More disturbing for AREA was a recommendation of the Ministerial Committee that the term "remedial education" be changed because it implied a separate teaching discipline based on the child's failure. The Committee believed that remedial education should be part of "ordinary effective teaching". The editors' response was to describe the Committee's view as "naïve and disturbingly ignorant of the needs of special children and what is presently available for them". They pointed out that few classroom teachers had the time or expertise to plan and monitor the effectiveness of individual programs based on diagnostic testing. Moreover, there were some children for whom remedial education in the classroom was simply not possible.

In the following issue, the editors reprinted a memorandum on Special Assistance Programs in Primary Schools from the Director of Primary Education in

Victoria, which advised that the term "special assistance" had replaced "remedial teaching" (Collins, 1980). While acknowledging that provision for children with learning difficulties remained a significant problem in primary schools, the thrust of the memorandum was that principals should "develop comprehensive educational policies related to special assistance". A senior "or otherwise qualified" teacher was to be appointed to coordinate and implement the special assistance program within the school, with the primary responsibility of ensuring that children with learning difficulties should remain "successfully" in the classroom. In-service programs would be developed for teachers appointed to be responsible for special assistance. In schools with an enrolment of over 300 students, the special assistance teacher would not have additional responsibility for a grade.

Commenting on the memorandum, Davidson and Weigall (1980) were clearly sceptical about the adequacy of the special assistance concept, particularly in relation to qualifications of the appointed teacher, but also in relation to the amount of time one teacher could give to the program in a school of over 300 students. Further, in schools of less than 300 students, Davidson and Weigall claimed, the amount of special assistance provision that would be available was not made clear. Editorials such as these clearly reflected the strength of AREA's belief that children with learning difficulties were missing out in school classrooms.

Beyond reading

While most articles were concerned with reading, articles on mathematics also appeared regularly, with frequent contributors on this topic being John Munro and Theodore MacDonald (for example, MacDonald, 1975; Munro, 1977). Other popular topics were language difficulties, including written expression, spelling, oral language, hand writing, adult literacy, and teaching English as a second language. Peter Westwood, then Principal Education Officer with the South Australian Education Department, contributed an article on oral language development (Westwood, 1977), while Weigall (1979, p. 2) used his editorial column to express concern about recently arrived boat people who might have difficulty in "acquiring the basic skills so necessary for leading a normal life in our society", and reminded readers that "our charter is... to help all those who need help".

By the early 1980s a much greater range of topics was starting to appear – it was almost as if everything that could be said about reading difficulty and how to teach reading had been said, and editors (or contributors)

were looking for new material. Topics dealt with in "one-off" articles reflected the wide range of problems encountered in remedial education as well as the diverse areas in which remedial needs might occur. Remedial programs in a prison setting, and pre-school education in remote mining communities occupied one issue alone. Articles on the environmental effects of lead, working with disabled children, teaching history and social studies to "slow learners", calligraphy, and programs for gifted and talented children were included in the second issue of 1981, while the third issue included articles on emotional and behavioural problems, and hyperactivity. Hyperactivity had already been the focus of an earlier article, in which Boyle (1979) described a successful time-out program which had shown some success in eliminating hyperactive behaviours in a group of 11 hyperactive boys. The fourth issue in 1982 (Volume 13 No 4) was considerably expanded – from the usual 40 pages to 56, including 11 pages of book reviews – to accommodate a backlog of contributions. Topics included using the dictionary in primary school, art education, use of a multi-disciplinary approach to support, and cultural disadvantage.

Special issues

By 1980 AREA could boast a print run of 1700 copies, which was 'increasing rapidly at a rate of about 500 copies a year'. The journal was being sent all over Australia and to 15 overseas countries with some articles being translated into Spanish. The *AJRE* was now recorded in major catalogues and retrieval systems for special education[8].

In 1982 the first two issues of Volume 14 were combined into a single, Golden Jubilee issue of 130 pages to mark the 50th issue of the *AJRE*. A lengthy editorial written by journal editor Chris Davidson and AREA president John Munro introduced the issue (Davidson & Munro, 1982). The editorial lamented the lack of feedback on the journal, but took heart from the fact that the print run had grown from 425 in May 1969 to 2000 for the jubilee issue. The journal was now being distributed in 20 countries, and attracted many high calibre contributions.

The editorial included a comprehensive set of recommendations prepared by John Munro, based on recorded feedback from discussion groups at AREA's Fifth National Conference, held in conjunction with SPELD and Melbourne State College in June 1981. The recommendations covered such issues as teacher training, including the need to include a core component at pre-service level to equip classroom teachers to cater for the needs of low achievers; the role of the classroom

teacher; the need for specialist trained personnel both to work with low achievers and to provide support for the classroom teacher; and recognition of the needs of low achievers for a more structured approach to learning. There were also a number of recommendations relating to parents, including parent-teacher communication that recognised the role of the parent; financial assistance; parents' rights; and recommendations relating to medical and paramedical professionals, and to employers. The recommendations were an indication of AREA's increasing concern with the broad spectrum of remedial education, not just the concerns of remedial consultants.

Articles in this special issue were contributed by invited specialists in remedial and special education under the broad theme of "A world overview of trends in helping the learning disabled child". The content was chosen to represent a mixture of the latest in research findings and in practice[9]. Professor Marie Neale of Monash University traced developments in remedial education over the previous three decades, and called for greater support for research into remediation processes. Yvonne Stewart provided an overview of the role of SPELD organisations in Australia. Dr T. D. Hagger, formerly of the School Medical Service and foundation president of SPELD, reviewed suggested causes of learning disabilities. Angela Ridsdale, a past president of AREA, examined remedial education from the point of view of the class teacher, while a contribution from the Netherlands provided a further review of theories of learning disability. The remaining articles were grouped under the headings of editorials and overviews, written by overseas as well as Australian authors.

An uncertain future

"Whither the *Australian Journal of Remedial Education*?", asked a writer in the November 1983 *Bulletin*[10]. The cost of producing the journal was mounting and AREA Council began to consider more economical means of production. Four issues had to be produced each year in order to meet postal registration requirements. The alternative was a change in format, and Council decided to trial the substitution of two regular issues of the journal with two Resource Sets, retaining the existing format for the other two issues. Each Resource Set was to be based on a specific theme, and was organised into a folder containing separate sheets. The format was less convenient, though, and lasted only for a year or two before the journal reverted to four bound issues a year.

More serious questions about the future were beginning to emerge – through the pages of the journal as elsewhere. Weigall (1978) had questioned the relevance of the curriculum for children with learning difficulties and the value judgments on which it was based. Small, isolated moves were taking place in individual schools and in the South Australian Education Department to consider alternative provision from normal hours of schooling, but the move towards integration of students with disabilities into mainstream schools was gaining momentum and separate programs for some students were losing favour. As the 70s merged into the 80s special educational needs were beginning to get more attention. Clearly the changes that were foreshadowed had implications for remedial education.

The Warnock Report (Warnock, 1978) in England was to have considerable influence on thinking about special education in Australia, and especially on the forthcoming review of special education in Victoria, although the Victorian review would eventually go far beyond Warnock's recommendations (see Part Two in this series). A timely article by Chatwin (1983) summarised the report and its implications.

The Warnock Report recommended that categories of disability should be abandoned, and that special education should embrace a much wider range of educational needs. The report had implications not only for the broad range of needs considered to come under the heading of special education, but also for the organisation of special education provision and for the training of classroom and special teachers. Integration was becoming an option for students who would usually have been placed in a special class or school. An article reprinted from the South Australian branch newsletter of AREA cautioned against expecting too much from integration, particularly if adequate support was not provided (Cunningham, 1983). There would still be a need for teachers trained to support students with learning difficulties.

Despite occasional setbacks, the *Australian Journal of Remedial Education* had not only survived but had forged ahead. Although, as a non-refereed publication, it continued to be a mixture of practical advice, opinion, and well-supported research, together with notices of events and submissions, it never lacked interest. Its contents reflected a wide range of changing views and practices in remedial education. It would continue to do so in the years ahead.

Endnotes

1. AREA Council Minutes, 2 June 1975.
2. Editorial, *Australian Journal of Remedial Education*, Vol 7 No 3, 1975.
3. Minutes of AREA Annual General Meeting, 2 June 1975.
4. AREA Council Minutes, 13 February 1979; 12

November 1979.

5. Editorial, *Australian Journal of Remedial Education*, Vol 9 No 4, 1977.
6. Editorial, *Australian Journal of Remedial Education*, Vol 7 No 3, 1975.
7. Editorial, *Australian Journal of Remedial Education*, Vol 7 No 2, 1975.
8. Editorial, *Australian Journal of Remedial Education*, Vol 12 No 3, 1980.
9. *AREA Bulletin*, Vol 13 No 3, June 1981.
10. *AREA Bulletin*, Vol 15 No 4, November 1983.

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

Josephine C. Jenkinson

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 AREA[1]. 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 difficulties[2]. 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 Victoria[3].

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)

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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 areas[5].

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 disabilities[6]. 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 AREA[7].

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 involvement[8].

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 schools[9]. 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 journal[10].

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 journal[12]. 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 needed[13]. 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 service[15]. An article in the *Waverley Gazette* produced a large number of enquiries from the Waverley area[16]. 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 Council[17]. 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 education[18]. Consultant members continued to be mainly primary-trained teachers, reflecting the fact that the majority of referrals were children of primary age[19].

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 insurance[20].

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 unfairly[21].

The work involved in matching students to consultants was substantial, and to relieve the administrative load Rosemary Carter was appointed Referral Service Officer in 1991[22], 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 service[23].

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 met[24]. 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 members[26].

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 secondary[27]. 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 maths[28]. 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 years[29]. 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 AREA[30]. 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 1990[31]. 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' Register[32].

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 strategies[33]. 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 Deaf[34]. 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 Missouri[35]. Catering for an increasing demand for remedial education in maths, John Munro continued to run the Mathematics Learning Centre at Melbourne State College[36].

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 Sleigh 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 field[38].

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 brochure[39].

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 concessions[40].

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 comprehension[41]. 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 difficulties[42].

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 Treasurer[43].

In 1994 AREA adopted the concept of 'presidential succession', with the president-elect to be a member of Council each year[44]. 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 teleconference[45].

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 resources[46]. 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 subscribers[47].

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 even[48].

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 members[50]. 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 difficulties[51].

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 premises[52].

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 responsibility[53].

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 footing[55]. 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 conference[56].

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 organisation[57]. 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 President[58].

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 up[59]. Relocation to the University of Melbourne also provided a central meeting place for the association, professional stimulus, and an opportunity to reorganise AREA's services[60].

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 school[61].

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 presented this proposal to AREA members at the next AGM[62].

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 AREA[63]. 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 rationale[64]. 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 community[65]. 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-commitee 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 overseas[66].

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 difficulties[67]. 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.
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26. Notice to consultant members from Nola Firth, member of consultant committee, n.d.
27. AREA Council Minutes, 23 July 1989; 11 September 1989.
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36. AREA Council Minutes, 23 May 1984.
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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.

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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.

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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.

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A history of Learning Difficulties Australia: part five – the journal (continued)

Josephine C. Jenkinson

Abstract

Part Five in this series on the history of Learning Difficulties Australia continues the history, begun in Part Three, of the association's journal. During this time the quality of articles in the journal came under scrutiny, and refereeing, at first only of research reports, later of all contributions, came into practice. Editorial policy continued to embrace reports of new teaching methods and therapies as a means of informing readers, but contributions also reflected changes taking place in special education and in teacher training. Articles about reading continued to dominate as the debate between whole language and phonics approaches heated up. In 1996 the name of the journal was changed to reflect the broader interests of the association in learning difficulties.

The decade spanning the five years before and after the turn of the millennium was a difficult one for AREA. The *Australian Journal of Remedial Education (AJRE)*, however, remained a stable force during a period of significant change in the association and in special education generally. During the latter half of the 1980s the journal would continue to be the major means of communication with members on remedial education issues. Over this period, it also served as a major forum for debate about methods for teaching reading, discussion of new programs and old 'fads', and incorporation of computer technology into the teaching of students with learning disabilities. The editors could rightly claim international recognition as selected *AJRE* articles were extracted and recorded on microfiche through overseas agencies, while contributions came from countries in the Pacific, Asia, Africa, Europe and North America.

Yet the role of the journal as a professional publication was still not clearly defined. In addition to academic articles, contributions frequently covered more practical or transitory topics such as the role of remedial teachers or consultants in schools and private practice, case studies, reviews, news items, and in one case, an obituary.

Refereeing of articles

An ongoing issue was the independent refereeing of contributions before accepting them for publication. Chris Davidson, as editor, believed that refereeing was not appropriate, that it did not necessarily guarantee the quality of an article, that it would involve increased costs for extra postage, and that the time involved could delay publication[1]. Davidson's point about quality was later vindicated when a Council member commented that "reviewers need to go through articles more thoroughly"[2].

Moreover, refereeing of all contributions was inconsistent with editorial policy, reiterated by Davidson at a meeting of the Publications Sub-committee, which stated that the journal would continue to include articles dealing with new and untried approaches to remedial education as a means of stimulating debate[3].

Davidson's arguments were not accepted, however. Early in 1991 John Munro announced that from March 1993 the *AJRE* would be refereed and the editor would convene a committee to select referees[4]. John Elkins from the University of Queensland offered assistance with a structure for the referee process, and the new editorial board consisted of Chris Davidson as Editor, Richard Weigall as Associate Editor, six consultant editors including one to advise on computers, two review editors, and a referee panel of twelve, mostly drawn from academic institutions and including international representatives[5].

A compromise was reached following Peter Westwood's suggestion that research articles should be refereed but not reviews or articles describing classroom practice. Council reacted favourably to the idea of a separate refereed research section[6], and the journal became part-refereed from the beginning of 1993, when contributors were advised that "Authors wishing their article to be refereed must request it"[7]. By 1997, contributions were divided into 'refereed papers' and 'articles'. The last two issues of 1997 carried only refereed papers and the journal is now fully refereed.

Breaking down barriers

Policies for integration of students with disabilities into mainstream schools were in full swing by the mid-1980s, and the third issue of the *AJRE* for 1985 was devoted to this topic. Professor Marie Neale, as guest editor, noted

the unique conditions in Australia that had led to several innovations in providing support in a widely dispersed population. Dr Michael Steer, Director of the newly formed Integration Unit in the Victorian Department of Education, discussed the philosophy and principles underlying integration, and predicted that a wide range of social, educational, and vocational opportunities would be opened up for children with disabilities integrated into regular schools. Other articles presented case studies of integration[8].

Training in remedial and special education was a continuing concern. Most courses in special education were offered at graduate diploma or fourth year bachelor level, but with considerable diversity in course structure, required contact time and supervised practicum. Victoria was the only state which specifically registered qualified special education teachers for appointment to permanent positions in specialist facilities (Pickering, 1987). Of particular relevance for remedial education was the fact that, while ten courses identified by Pickering in a national survey dealt specifically with learning difficulties, resource teaching, learning disability or special assistance, there was little conscious planning in the development of courses to meet current needs.

Teacher training could influence those about to enter the profession, but the success of integration required the removal of entrenched barriers among practising teachers. A review of research on teacher attitudes to integration by Konza, Gow, Hall and Balla (1987) revealed significant stress and anxiety among classroom teachers, and a need to introduce a comprehensive range of supports. These included adequate funding, modifications to the physical environment and material resources, but also emphasised resource personnel, classroom teacher commitment, and training at both pre-service and in-service levels. The role of the integration coordinator received special attention.

The theme of breaking down barriers posed by teacher attitudes resurfaced in a celebration of the 100th issue of the journal[9]. Fields (1995) suggested strategies for overcoming teacher resistance to integration of children with disabilities, especially in relation to working with support teachers in a consultative framework. Westwood (1995) examined teachers' locus of control in the context of dealing with learning problems, and Hay (1995) examined teacher actions in relation to student effort, self-perception and achievement.

Legal issues were also emerging. The federal *Disability Discrimination Act* and corresponding state Acts were scheduled to come into force in March 1993, with a significant impact on schools in meeting their obligations to students with disabilities. The second issue of the journal in 1996 included a lift-out supplement, originally published by Villamanta Publishing Services, *A User*

Guide to the Disability Discrimination Act. Printed on blue paper, the guide could be easily removed from the journal for a handy reference. Williams (1996) cited a case from the English legal system in which a student had been granted financial compensation on the basis of negligence when an educational authority had failed to make provision for a learning disability. The author warned that this case "at the very least puts Australian education professionals on notice, that what they do in classrooms every day when dealing with students' learning needs may well be seen as attracting a legal duty of care" (p. 13).

By the mid-1990s integration had been redefined as 'inclusion', and Westwood (1997) urged a gradual approach, especially for children with behaviour problems for whom the class teacher felt poorly equipped. Successful inclusion of these children would require a commitment to provision of appropriate funding and resources, and both pre-service and ongoing training for class teachers. Westwood also advocated the retention of special schools and classes where necessary.

Teacher training continued to be an issue, but as claims were made of falling standards of literacy and numeracy, the focus of contributions turned to preparation for reading and mathematics teaching across the whole range of students. Maglen (1997a) examined teachers' attitudes and morale in the context of literacy standards, and "their unreasonable perceptions of why students fail" (p. 2). According to Maglen, teachers attributed the failure of some children to learn, despite the use of currently "fashionable" teaching methods, to the students themselves or to their family background. It was time, Maglen concluded, that literacy teaching had highest priority and that teachers changed their approach with students who had clearly not benefited from an existing method.

Teacher attitudes were also addressed by Roll and Greaves (2005), who used several data collection techniques to examine the views of beginning and experienced teachers on pre-service preparation for teaching literacy and numeracy to students with a range of needs, including learning difficulties. Roll and Greaves concluded that most primary (but not secondary) teachers felt well-prepared to teach literacy and numeracy, although fewer teachers felt as well prepared to work with the diverse needs of students from a non-English speaking background, indigenous students, those from families with low SES, and students with disabilities.

The reading debate

Criticism of the teaching of reading in the *AJRE* frequently targeted the Whole Language, or 'language experience', approach emphasised at the time by the Victorian

Ministry for Education (Sykes, 1991). Underlying this approach was the belief that children could learn to read simply by being exposed to print, just as they learned to talk 'naturally' by hearing spoken language. The method had appeal, but, as Sykes pointed out, there was little empirical research available to support its superiority over more traditional, skills-oriented methods.

Jackson's (1986) criticism went further, claiming that reading instruction in many schools had degenerated into a "kidwatching" experience in which children were taught to read by visual rote memorisation of printed material, while teachers deplored the use of synthetic, analytic, linguistic or phonic instruction or attention to the nature of the reading process itself. Children were learning to repeat whole sentences from memory based on their own "natural language", but were unable to read the same words in a different sentence. Jackson identified a number of unjustified assumptions underlying the natural language approach, concluding:

> It is time this kind of educational dogma was relegated to its rightful place. At the moment it is demoralising and confusing the teaching profession, but above all, and much more seriously, it is denying children the right to access reading and spelling via more than one route. (Jackson, 1986, p. 10)

While Whole Language methods were still in favour, arguments for including phonics instruction gathered strength, most critics favouring a balanced approach to reading. Jorm (1986), for example, identified problems in storage and retrieval of phonological information from long-term memory as an important cognitive factor in reading difficulty, but also recognised the importance of social factors, such as encouragement to read in the home, which interacted with cognitive factors. Reviewing arguments for and against the inclusion of phonics, Westwood (1986) concluded that there was a stage in reading acquisition, as children became increasingly familiar with print, in which instruction was needed in letter-sound correspondences, especially for children having difficulty in decoding unfamiliar words which could not be predicted from context. In a guest editorial, Westwood (1994) blamed a decline in South Australian spelling standards on the Whole Language approach, in which students were taught only to spell specific words as the need arose.

An English educationalist agreed:

> ... we do get rather weary of all the fads that come along. The latest one in the UK – I am sure it has reached Australia as well – is that of 'real reading'. Just give a child a book that is interesting to them, and lo and behold! – they will read. Brightly coloured books with good pictures are all that are needed according to this approach. I am a firm believer that one cannot get away from the basics, no matter how difficult, grinding and tedious it can be at times. (Thomson, 1991, pp. 2-3)

Weigall (1992, p. 2) attributed at least some of the blame to publishing houses "which advocate a non-phonic approach at junior primary level and who assume that children will learn to read through memorising the configurations of hundreds of words without the benefit of proficient decoding skills". Some of these publishers, Weigall claimed, had formed an "unholy alliance" with teaching organisations to promote the whole language approach. Council expressed concern that a proposed issue of the journal devoted to 'Whole Language' could be too general[10].

Phonemic awareness, an aspect of phonics teaching that had been neglected in the journal, although it was not new to academic research in reading, was introduced by Munro and Munro (1993). Phonemic awareness refers to the ability to analyse the sounds in words, and works reciprocally – phonemic awareness is essential in eliciting meaning from print, and in turn develops as children learn to associate sounds with letters or letter combinations. Munro and Munro (1994) also reviewed research which stressed the importance of efficient word recognition in freeing the reader's attention to focus on comprehension of text, and suggested that dyslexia could be related to an inability to use phonological knowledge to decode unfamiliar words.

In 1998 a special issue of the journal was produced which included five substantial refereed papers on the role of phonemic awareness in language acquisition. A team from Massey University, New Zealand, Tunmer, Chapman, Ryan, and Prochnow (1998) reported key findings from a six-year investigation into the role of language and motivational factors in early literacy development, concluding that knowledge of spelling-sound patterns was more effective than ability to use sentence context. Children who reported using word-level information in Year 1 also performed better on tests of reading, including comprehension, one and two years later, compared to children who reported a preference for using non-word level cues, including context. Tunmer et al. also found that use of materials and procedures to teach phonological skills significantly improved reading achievement in beginning readers.

Munro (1998) confirmed the importance of phonological knowledge in early reading, while Thomson (1998) provided a model of early reading that teachers could use to incorporate phonological skills into their teaching practice. Love and Reilly (1998) offered practical suggestions for the classroom.

Criticism of the Whole Language approach was not confined to educators. Zollner, Harrison and Magill

(1996) investigated aspects of early reading, including whole-word processing skills, letter reversals, phonic skills (letter sounds, sound blending, and blending syllables into words), and proofreading skills in 615 students who had been referred to an optometry practice with a special interest in literacy. They concluded that many males and some females were significantly disadvantaged by an early emphasis on whole-word guessing and predictive cueing, contributing to a decline in literacy levels.

Hempenstall (1996) was even stronger in his criticism of the Whole Language approach, taking education authorities to task for endorsing a method that was clearly not supported by research evidence. He called upon researchers to adopt the unaccustomed task of attempting to influence decision-makers. "For the sake of those not well served by the current system", he concluded, "... it is surely time to stop fiddling around the problem. It is time to address the core issue: the manner in which we approach beginning reading instruction" (p. 30).

A boxed quote headed 'California bans whole language' reported legislation to ban the use of (U.S.) government funds for Whole Language teaching of reading and writing, insisting that "unfamiliar words must be decoded ..."[11]. The extract referred to this move as the "phonics revolution", as though the teaching of phonics was an innovation never before tried. It is telling of the 'fad' mentality that this article did not advocate a mixed approach with a balance of strategies, which would have allowed context to confirm, if not aid, the child's efforts at decoding.

Contributors were also concerned with more general literacy issues. Results of a survey by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), which indicated that as many as one third of secondary students lacked sufficient literacy skills to cope with their curriculum, were rejected by teachers and teacher educators (Maglen, 1997b). Maglen argued that, rather than debating teaching methods, educators should be asking what society wants from schools, identifying as a major objective the acquisition of skills in literacy, numeracy and socialisation that would enable students to participate successfully in community activities and in further education:

> Those who argue that this is an impossible objective for some children need to seriously address the question about whether these children should have to attend school at all: for many of them the whole schooling experience is a relentless litany of failure and unhappiness. (Maglen, 1997b, p. 25)

Maglen criticised academics who used conferences to further their own biases in teaching methods, or simply preached to the converted. She also criticised those who blamed parents' ignorance and misunderstanding for their children's poor literacy, or who assumed that parents were competent to take on the role of reading instructor. She praised the majority of teachers who were dedicated and hard-working and had their students' interests at heart, but called for strong leadership that would get rid of the few who were "lazy, incompetent and uncaring". She abhorred the "evangelical righteousness" of opposing factions in literacy education that precluded reasoned discussion about good teaching methods, but especially those who promoted the Whole Language approach as the only way to guarantee success. Good teachers, Maglen concluded, "have always been open to new ideas and able to incorporate what is useful – many use an amalgam of methods and approaches that is constantly modified to meet individual learning styles". It was a well-reasoned article, but contained some provocative material to be heeded by both academics and practitioners.

Gender differences and debate about reasons for the preponderance of males among students with reading difficulties emerged from time to time as a topic for discussion. In a survey of child and adult referrals for literacy problems, Robinson (1997) found that the gender discrepancy was much larger among children (male-female ratio of 2.2:1) compared to adults (male-female ratio of 1.2:1). Robinson suggested that the difference may be explained by a male tendency to react to learning difficulties with lowered self-esteem leading to disruptive behaviour, whereas females tend to withdraw and their problems are overlooked because they do not draw attention to themselves.

Much of this debate was concerned with general trends in literacy, rather than with the nature and causes of reading difficulties. The fourth issue of the journal in 1997, however, returned to the basics of specific learning difficulties. Bradshaw (1995) deplored the increased number of children in Australia identified as having a learning disability, a trend that followed the United States, where it was predicted that by 2000 one third of the school population would be so labelled. Bradshaw named this trend "mislabelling", and proposed four alternative explanations for failure to learn: neglect of individual differences in learning styles; differences in left-right brain dominance in a system which tended to favour left-brain functioning; lack of self-esteem; and behaviour disorders often arising from a regimented school atmosphere.

In the same issue Brock (1995) provided a clear discussion of dyslexia and its common features, also pointing out the importance of self-esteem in children who have difficulty in learning, while Young (1995) discussed a wide range of research perspectives that had influenced the teaching of students with learning disabilities, from Piaget to Vygotsky and coloured lenses.

Fads and cures

Supporters of fads and supposed cures for reading disability continued to find an outlet in the journal. The use of coloured lenses to facilitate reading was promoted in the 1980s by Helen Irlen. Lenses obtainable only from practitioners licensed by Irlen were prescribed to suit the individual according to a specific combination of tint and density determined by testing procedures. The lenses were consequently quite expensive. Stanley (1987) agreed that some aspects of reading performance, such as reading speed and reduction of glare, could be improved by the use of coloured lenses, but coloured overlays were just as effective and much less expensive. He pointed out that Irlen's claims were as yet unsupported by methodologically sound research and her methods could only be regarded as experimental. Articles which followed showed similar caution; although authors acknowledged that coloured lenses could facilitate reading by enhancing the clarity of words on the page, there was little evidence to support claims that these lenses could be a 'cure' for reading disability.

Stanley was taken to task by O'Connor and Sofo (1988) who claimed that Stanley failed to acknowledge the contribution made by clinical research in such fields as medicine and psychology. O'Connor and Sofo reviewed recent research that supported the relatively high prevalence among children with reading disabilities of Irlen's concept of 'scotopic sensitivity', or sensitivity to certain frequencies and wavelengths of the white light spectrum, on which the use of coloured lenses was based. Whiting (1988) also reported positive results from the use of coloured lenses, but acknowledged that those who participated in his study were likely to be highly motivated to show improvements.

Arguments about Irlen lenses ceased until Whiting, Robinson and Parrott (1994) followed up 267 subjects who had been using Irlen filters for at least six years. Of the 43 per cent who responded to their follow-up survey, most continued to report improvements, especially in visual perception of print and ease of reading, evident, for example, in fewer skipped lines and fewer substitution errors consisting of words of similar shape. These effects, however, were not universal, being most beneficial for students who already had some basic reading skills. Irlen and Robinson (1996) reported significant improvements in workplace productivity and satisfaction for Californian workers who used coloured lenses on the job. A team from the University of Newcastle, Robinson, Roberts, McGregor, Dunstan, and Butt (1999), described a preliminary investigation of a biochemical basis for 'Irlen syndrome' in people with chronic fatigue syndrome.

Another popular therapy in the late 1980s was conductive education, developed in Hungary. Conductive education emphasised the teaching of important life skills through intensive individual methods by a 'conductor', a dedicated specialist who was trained to teach these skills to children with motor disorders such as those associated with cerebral palsy. While significant improvements in independent movement had been claimed for children in Hungary, Silver (1987) questioned whether the system could ever be as successful in the somewhat less rigid atmosphere of Australian society.

An American contributor, Carla Hannaford (1994), introduced the concept of 'brain gym', also referred to as 'educational kinesiology'. Brain gym, developed by American educator Paul Dennison, was described as "a series of specific brain integrative movements designed to bring attention and fully activate the neo-cortex of the brain ... and activate visual, auditory and kinaesthetic functioning for ease of learning" (p. 25). Hannaford used case studies to demonstrate the effectiveness of her methods in improving behaviour and learning.

Hannah (1994) described a brain gym program in a Queensland school, but her claims about the program were not supported by objective evidence. A problem common to most of these articles on specific methods and strategies was their authorship by people who were actually engaged in using the method, and so had a vested interest in demonstrating its effectiveness. There was a notable absence of independent research in supporting specific programs or instructional methods in special and remedial education.

Greaves (1994) defended the journal for raising awareness of new programs, arguing that remedial education has no single set of commonly agreed principles:

A rationale for the existence of this journal is to inform its readers of methods and strategies which are appropriate for children with learning difficulties, on the basis that this group appears to have needs in addition to the classroom approaches which are generally available. This premise creates the scene for a debate on the choice of the most appropriate method or strategy. Recent articles in this journal (1994, nos. 1-3) inform readers of this debate. Should the teacher spend his/her limited time with the child on phonics, Distar, meta-cognitive strategies, brain gym, Irlen coloured filters and/or use a sloped desk top? (p. 2)

But Greaves also urged caution in the adoption of new methods:

... Faith in a theory is insufficient justification for its implementation. Innovations for their own sake ... may lack substance, and usually do lack unbiased evidence to substantiate their use. Even published

research may be no better than suggestive of support for a new theory because of measurement and other methodological problems. (Greaves, 1994, p. 2)

Dykes (1997) called for educators to get rid of "fads" based on false assumptions about the teaching of literacy, and for State education authorities to stop indiscriminately importing overseas ideas and materials. "For years Australia has blindly followed the lead of other western countries and of the U.S. in particular," she wrote. "The time lag ensures that we introduce new systems just as other countries are realising their flaws." (p. 30)

Learner characteristics

A more promising direction came from contributions that focused attention on the learner. In an inspiring editorial entitled 'Wonderful Willy' (a reference to a current concern for preserving whales), Weigall (1995) urged educators to become involved in the interests of children to engage them in learning, rather than attempting to impose adult interests.

Several contributors added a new dimension to learning disability by exploring individual differences in learning style. Knight (1993) discussed research which showed that internal locus of control (the belief that one has control over the outcomes of one's actions) promotes active involvement and independence in learning, and its relevance for teachers in promoting children's learning. Recent research on learning styles and motivational aspects suggested that children with learning disabilities tended to be passive learners who lacked a motivational orientation to learning and thus failed to employ effective learning strategies (Chan, 1993). According to Chan, a more active, self-directed pattern of learning could be fostered with a supportive atmosphere and classroom practices such as self-instruction, goal-setting, self-monitoring and self-reinforcement, which would help to prevent expectation of failure among many learning disabled students.

The 'whole school' approach to literacy

Such strategies could be incorporated into a 'whole school' approach to literacy, which was the focus of a special issue edited by Greaves (1999) in response to questions about the priority given to literacy within the school program. The thrust of contributions to this issue was that a structured literacy program, with adequate, regular time commitment and continual monitoring of students' progress, was crucial for the successful teaching of reading.

Hill and Crevola (1999) described one example. A daily literacy block of two hours, incorporating both whole-class 'shared reading' and small group teaching, was timetabled for every class in a school. Instead of expecting that some children would fail to acquire adequate literacy skills, the school adopted an attitude that all children were capable of achieving. Rigorous performance standards were set. Ongoing assessment of students and professional development were other key features of this approach that produced more effective teaching outcomes.

In an epilogue to the issue, Munro (1999) identified several trends in the programs described. Consistent with concepts of school effectiveness, each of the schools took responsibility for acquisition of literacy within the school. Support programs were an integral part of the curriculum and involved the whole school, not just the early years. Systematic and structured learning was emphasised, with monitoring of individual and school literacy outcomes a crucial component. Students were encouraged to be active participants in the learning process. Finally, professional development of teachers was integrated into the program.

This approach represented a marked change from earlier programs for students with learning difficulties:

> The earlier paradigm was characterised by an approach that saw these students as 'defective' ... Their approach to learning was diagnosed by 'experts' and they were frequently involved in learning support programs away from their regular classroom ... The present paradigm, with its focus on inclusion, sees all learners moving along a developmental continuum in literacy development. (Munro, 1999, p. 39)

The role of remedial consultants was being challenged, with consultants in private practice feeling less than welcome in schools, tolerated only to meet parents' wishes:

> The school perspective is that the private practitioner's work is ... a direct criticism of their literacy provision for the student with learning difficulties. This perception is further reinforced when the private practitioner recommends or uses assessments not available in the school and implements approaches which contrast sharply with school literacy practices and policies. (Greaves, 1999, p. 2)

The private practitioner, on the other hand, perceived that the school's methods had not succeeded in teaching students with learning difficulties, and instead implemented methods which he or she had found successful with other students.

The inclusive approach, however, made certain assumptions about the nature of reading difficulties, to which educational consultants had not yet adapted:

> Without the opportunity to negotiate a role for themselves within the changed context [educational

consultants] ... continue to operate largely in ways that they did earlier and assess the educational provision in terms of the earlier paradigm ... In order to work within the recast model, consultants need to align their professional knowledge with the changed directions. They need to identify the contributions their areas of expertise can make to overall understanding of a child's learning needs. They need to recognize their roles in an essential partnership that is based on mutual respect and valuing. (Munro, 1999, p. 39)

It was a far cry from perceptual-motor programs, Irlen lenses, kinesiology and the many other 'cures' for learning difficulties that had been debated for three decades in the pages of the journal.

Computer education

Computers made strong inroads in remedial education in the 1980s, and in 1984 a computer section was introduced into the *AJRE*, edited by Gerry Kennedy. Negotiations with the Computer Education Group of Victoria resulted in joint production of an issue on 'Computing and Special Education' in 1986[12]. Contributors discussed the uses of computer technology in the classroom, for analysing teaching material, for educational diagnosis, in interactive programs for children with language problems, and in facilitating remedial reading, maths and writing instruction. Colbourn and McLeod (1986) outlined a model of computer-guided educational diagnosis that could be used by the classroom teacher.

Another special publication on computers and education, combining two issues, celebrated AREA's Silver Jubilee in 1990. Contributors provided further examples of computer use in remedial and special education, using a word processor to help language disordered children and adults to write, computer-assisted learning for students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities and as a resource in integration, the computer as a focus for group interaction, fostering computer literacy, and integrating computer technology into the classroom.

As technology became more widespread, creative and varied, a further issue published articles on the use of reactive toys and switches to teach a range of skills, including cause and effect relationships, guidelines for software to teach spelling, hardware and software for computer-assisted communication, and keyboard strategies for children with poor handwriting skills[13]. With increasing numbers of computers in schools, many more typefaces became available for presentation of printed texts and work sheets, and another special issue, sub-titled 'Words, graphics and symbols: A new literacy ... using computers', dealt with typography[14], including

the suitability of typography for children learning to read (Sassoon, 1993).

Kennedy (1992) cautioned against use of technology for its own sake without relating it to the needs of the child, but also claimed that, compared to society generally, schools lagged far behind in cutting-edge technology, largely because of lack of funding (Kennedy, 1993). This lack was exacerbated by teachers not having the technical expertise to prepare submissions for available funds. Even if they did succeed in obtaining funds from philanthropic or other sources, teachers often did not have the time to learn to use new equipment at a level at which they could feel comfortable working with a child. In the context of integration funding, new equipment was not in itself sufficient to ensure that it could be used to the benefit of the child.

The *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*

The *AJRE* celebrated its 100th issue in 1995 and the following year was renamed the *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities (AJLD)*, with numbering starting from Volume 1 Number 1. There was little change, however, in the style or content of the journal and authors could still choose whether or not to have their contributions refereed. The issue began with a guest editorial written by Fay Maglen, literacy coordinator at Holmesglen Institute of TAFE, on declining literacy skills, questioning why the amount of time spent in training teachers in literacy education should be decreasing when pre-service teacher training courses had increased to four years. Two articles dealt with left-right confusion, others with classroom conflict, the teaching of spelling, and teaching strategies for children with short-term memory problems. There were the usual notices and information about forthcoming events.

During the last years of the millennium much thought was given to the future of AREA. The president, Darryl Greaves, was clearly looking ahead on a range of issues as he drew on keynote addresses from a recent AREA conference held in Melbourne to consider the future role of the consultant:

... AREA members will need to be identified as specialist practitioners with a specific set of teaching and assessment skills. One of the identifying characteristics of a specialist is their ability to accurately assess a problematic situation in order to provide appropriate interventions. (Greaves, 1996, p. 2)

This focus on individual differences would require a significant shift from the emphasis over the previous decade on curriculum "as the panacea for a child's lack of educational progress".

The journal was reaching another crossroad. Greaves (1997) predicted that the entire contents of the *AJLD* would soon be available on AREA's newly created website, with subscribers choosing to receive a printed copy or having a pin number to download articles as they wished. Harking back to changes since the first issue had been produced on a Gestetner machine using stencils cut with a typewriter, Greaves urged the association to keep up with new methods of communication to ensure its viability. "At this point in the history of the AREA organisation," he wrote, "the potential of its world presence and the ease of international communication for this journal is quite amazing."

Editorial policy, though, showed little change, unless it was towards even greater eclecticism:

> The Journal aims to provide relevant, current information to a wide audience including special educators, teachers in training, school administrators, parents, and other professionals ... The Editors promote effective teaching approaches in the basic subjects including systematic multisensory instruction in reading, writing, and spelling which recognises the importance of phonemic awareness and the structure of language and related clinical educational intervention strategies for individuals with learning disabilities.

> The Editors are committed to the wide distribution of interdisciplinary, research-based knowledge and effective practice approaches regarding learning disabilities, including Specific Learning Difficulties (Dyslexia). Other subject areas include mathematics, dysgraphia, metacognition, self-esteem, [and] social issues such as 'tolerance' ...

> The Journal is truly international, welcoming well-written articles in English from writers around the world. The Editors strive for a balance between practical articles and research-based papers for each issue. Special issues dealing with a specific topic such as *Computers in Special Education* are a feature of our publishing programme. From time to time the Editors include articles of a potentially controversial nature, for example papers dealing with [a] new form of instruction, treatment or therapy. The Editors publish these in order to keep our readers informed and stimulate productive debate ...[15].

Learning difficulties: definitions and identification

The Federal Government had commissioned an investigation into learning difficulties in Australia, which formed the theme for a special issue of the *AJLD*. In an overview of the history of learning difficulties in Australia, Elkins (2000) defined Australian use of the term 'learning difficulties' as signifying students with academic and related school problems in the absence of an underlying impairment. He noted the implications of this situation for recognition and funding, and confusion about whether learning difficulties constituted a disability for the purpose of disability discrimination legislation at both school and tertiary levels of education.

Contributions by academic staff from Edith Cowan University, who were also involved in the federal project, dealt with research, definitions, school provisions and programs, and parental involvement. The issue concluded with a discussion by Greaves (2000) of the range of non-government services available for students with learning difficulties. These included SPELD, the Learning Difficulties Coalition of NSW, AREA, and various franchised services promoting specific methods or programs. In addition there were private practitioners in various professions, including teachers, speech pathologists, psychologists, optometrists, special educators in private practice and other specialists largely based on specific practices such as kinesiology and neuro-linguistic programming. It was a useful overview of the wide – perhaps for parents, bewildering – range of provisions and methods of practice for students with learning difficulties.

Chan and Dally (2001) summarised literature reviewed for the DETYA Report[16]. They contrasted definitions of learning difficulties common in the literature with the constructivist, or sociocultural, approach to defining learning difficulties which shifted the focus "from the individual nature of a learning disability to the embedded nature of an individual's actions within social contexts" (p. 13) – in this case the context of the classroom. The proponents of this approach argued for special educators to focus on the "sophisticated use and application" of basic skills, not just the acquisition of those skills. As the authors pointed out, confusion over the definition of learning difficulties added to problems in identifying students and estimating prevalence.

The impact of learning problems on parents gained attention with a report of an investigation into learning disabilities and parental stress. Bock and Shute (2001) found high levels of stress among parents of children with learning disabilities as a result of child and school factors, but excluding poor coping strategies. Nevertheless, a skill-based intervention program was effective in helping to reduce stress.

In 2001 a special issue was produced on assessment, now re-emerging as a controversial topic[17]. As Greaves (2001) pointed out, some educators believed that assessment gave a child a label, or argued that assessment rarely provided a basis for further instruction. Although authors in this issue generally favoured assessment, their contributions

contained a common thread that assessment should lead to an intervention that is beneficial to the student.

Between 2002 and 2004 articles continued to represent a variety of topics and viewpoints. In 2002 a special issue on giftedness focused on gifted students who had a learning disability. Munro (2002a) discussed the difficulties in identifying these children because they do not fit stereotyped notions of giftedness, and advocated teacher training in both giftedness and learning disabilities. In a study of gifted students with a reading disability, Munro (2002b) identified two groups: one showing superiority in both verbal comprehension and perceptual organisation, and one showing superiority only in perceptual organisation, but concluded that literacy disability in both groups could be attributed to a preference for the use of global rather than analytic information strategies.

Despite the exclusion of other disabilities from popular definitions of learning disability, there was considerable interest in disabilities that are often accompanied by learning difficulties, including attention deficit disorder and Asperger's syndrome. In a special issue on difficulties in mathematics, Munro (2003) defined and described dyscalculia. Phonemic awareness and other phonological processes, spelling, writing and written expression, support for children with special needs, self-concept and reading, computer literacy, and learning difficulties among university students were just some examples of the range of topics covered in the journal.

In around 150 issues of the journal, first the *Australian Journal of Remedial Education*, later the *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*, many thousands of words had been written about learning difficulties. How far had knowledge about the subject advanced? In a guest editorial, Weeks (2002) summarised what was known about dyslexia and reading difficulties, concluding that there was plenty of evidence to support the existence of dyslexia, and that it had a biological basis. Research could not provide a cure, but it did give some guidance on minimising the effects of dyslexia through phonological awareness programs and environmental enrichment, while also drawing attention to the inadequacy of teacher training in the area. Weeks believed that Australia was lagging behind both the UK and the USA in providing support for students with reading difficulties: although there were some good programs in individual schools, these were implemented on a 'piecemeal' basis. What was needed was a systematic approach to identification and support, which would include screening at preschool level and the routine development of phonological awareness as part of language programs: "In the primary school years we need mandated time spent on the explicit teaching of basic literacy skills which includes the teaching of phonics and an understanding of the English language as part of a balanced literacy program," Weeks wrote (2002, p. 3). Essential to this requirement would be recognition of the existence of dyslexia so that its impact could be better understood by teachers and appropriately addressed in schools.

Conclusion

Over almost four decades of editorship by Chris Davidson, assisted by Richard Weigall, the journal had evolved into an increasingly professional publication. Notices about current events and conferences were no longer included, although the emphasis was still on maintaining a balance between theoretical and practical content. Indeed, the editor was still wary of including too many "esoteric" papers, and categories were established to ensure that refereed papers would include not only articles discussing new practices, but "would meet the criteria of action research or more qualitative criteria, review articles and case studies"[18]. Articles that examined new strategies and methods or suggested new ways of looking at factors contributing to learning difficulties were acceptable, as were "creative articles that may provide new directions for research". Davidson's 37 years of editorship, during which he edited a total of 141 editions, has been suitably acknowledged following his retirement (Byers, 2005). Kevin Wheldall, of Macquarie University, NSW, replaced Chris Davidson as editor from the beginning of 2006, and will be joined by Alison Madelaine as co-editor in 2007.

The journal's flavour is perhaps less international than it was, but it can be argued that quality and relevance are more important than where contributions come from. However, the exclusion of news items and the publication of non-refereed papers in the *LDA Bulletin* have made it difficult at times to fill the journal. This difficulty may reflect an increasingly academic orientation that makes articles seem less relevant to classroom practice, an issue that needs to be resolved not just in relation to the journal, but within the association as a whole. It is also due to pressure on academics to publish in internationally recognised journals rather than in Australian journals, regardless of the quality of the publication.

The difficulty of filling the journal has prompted Council to reduce the number of issues per year, at least for the present, from four to two. In the meantime, Council is exploring the possibility of having the journal published by a well-respected international publishing house to make it more attractive as an avenue for publication, while essentially keeping its Australian character.

Endnotes

1. AREA Council Minutes, 5 September 1991.
2. AREA Council Minutes, 4 December 1994.
3. Minutes of Publications Sub-committee, 21 August 1991.
4. *Australian Journal of Remedial Education*, Vol 23 No 4, 1991.
5. AREA Council Minutes, 10 October 1992.
6. AREA Council Minutes, 5 December 1991; 6 February 1992.
7. Advice to contributors, *Australian Journal of Remedial Education*, Vol 25 No 1, 1993.
8. *Australian Journal of Remedial Education*, Vol 17 No 3, 1985.
9. *Australian Journal of Remedial Education*, Vol 27, 1995.
10. AREA Council Minutes, 5 November 1992.
11. *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*, Vol 2 No 3, 1997, p. 6, reprinted from *Educational Alternatives*, Issue 4, June 1997.
12. AREA Council Minutes, 17 February 1986; issued as *Australian Journal of Remedial Education*, Vol 18 No 4, 1986.
13. *Australian Journal of Remedial Education*, Vol 24 No 4, 1992.
14. *Australian Journal of Remedial Education*, Vol 25 No 3, 1993.
15. *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*, Vol 3 No 1, 1998.
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18. Editor's note, *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*, Vol 7 No 4, 2002, p. 2.

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A history of Learning Difficulties Australia: part six – looking ahead

Josephine C. Jenkinson

Abstract

This is the final in a series of articles tracing the history of Learning Difficulties Australia since the late 1960s, and covers the decade beginning in the mid-1990s. This decade has seen increasing professionalisation of the association through adoption and implementation of a Strategic Plan, more rigorous administrative procedures, a strengthening of nation-wide ties through interstate conferences and election of interstate Council members, and a change of name. The regular program of professional development has been maintained, as has the Consultants' Referral Service, with the introduction of a similar service in Queensland. Increased involvement of academic researchers in the association is reflected in greater pressure on specialist educators to employ research-based methods in the teaching of early reading. The association has continued to lobby for greater support for students with learning difficulties.

The Australian Resource Educators' Association

By the mid-1990s AREA, now the Australian Resource Educators' Association, had established a base at the University of Melbourne. Relocation, together with a policy of outsourcing and use of contract services, had eliminated salaries and overheads such as office space, superannuation and insurance, putting the association on a much sounder financial footing[1]. The late 1990s would see strengthening of national affiliations and the opening of a Referral Service in Queensland to coincide with the 1999 conference in Brisbane[2]. Approaching the end of his term as president, Daryl Greaves referred to AREA as "a vibrant and growing organisation", but also noted the complexity and diversity of Council's operations[3]. The workload for Council members was considerable.

Despite teleconferencing and frequent use of email, keeping in touch at a national level with crucial issues in each state was not easy. Sylvia Byers outlined the problem of identifying relevant groups with whom to work: ". . . the only way to get a national perspective on professional groups that lobby government and have a similar focus to AREA is to have one person in each state as a subcommittee", and suggested that a Council member from each state might be able to find a suitable person[4]. AREA had held its first public event in Queensland in 1997, attended by about 35 teachers and parents. The program had provided an introduction to AREA, a discussion of definitions of learning disability, and assessment and teaching strategies[5].

In 1996 a Mission Statement was developed, the purpose being "to clarify AREA's role and enable effective, focused planning for the future"[6]. The aims of the association were set out in terms of three functions: "The Australian Resource Educators' Association is the association dedicated to representing, resourcing and promoting members in their professional work, so that the highest level of service can be provided to those individuals experiencing learning difficulties."

Nola Firth, as President for 1999-2000 and convenor of the Strategic Planning Committee, together with President-elect Wendy Scott, prepared a set of targets for the next five years, building on the Mission Statement[7].

Use of the term 'resourcing' in the Mission Statement implied that the association existed to provide resources for members, rather than the members themselves being a resource for teachers and others. Indeed, some concern had already been expressed by the association's editorial committee about 'resource' being too vague a term, with the need to add riders for clarification[8]. Nevertheless, the association would continue to be seen primarily as a resource for members up to the present.

Discussion of terminology was not confined to the role of the association. Greaves (1996) questioned the term that should be adopted for children who were having difficulties with reading but were learning quite successfully in other areas. In addition to learning disabilities, specific learning disabilities and learning difficulties, Greaves identified several alternative terms used in the *Australian Journal of Remedial Education* during 1995: dyslexia, deep dyslexia, surface dyslexic, phonological dyslexic, reading disabled, learning disabled, and backward reading children. Greaves himself favoured 'backward reading'. But he also noted the confusion reported by the Australian Expert Advisory Panel on Learning Difficulties in Children and Adolescents between "word blindness, dyslexia,

and minimal brain dysfunction". The panel stated that learning difficulties included 10 to 16 per cent of children and adolescents who failed to show progress, and resulted from "intellectual disabilities, physical and sensory defects, emotional difficulties, inadequate environmental experiences [and] lack of appropriate educational opportunities". Learning disabilities, on the other hand, referred to 2 to 4 per cent of children and adolescents, and was claimed to be a sub-group within the learning difficulties group, presumably intrinsic to the individual but not caused by any of the other disabilities.

Despite reluctance to apply a label to children with learning disabilities, the lack of an unambiguous term suggested that a more distinctive name was needed, and debate about the association's name would continue well into the new century.

Constitution and committee structure

Following legal advice, AREA's constitution was re-written to incorporate a set of model rules developed by the Victorian Government in 1993 for voluntary associations as part of the Associations Incorporation Act. Council members provided written comments on the 1988 constitution, which the solicitor then incorporated into the new document, which was approved by Council in July 1997 (Greaves, 1997).

There had been several long-serving presidents since AREA had come into being: Anne Bishop from 1976 to 1979 and from 1989 to 1990; John Munro from 1979 to 1984 and from 1993 to 1994; Dianne Betts from 1984 to 1987; Anne Pringle from 1990 to 1993; and Daryl Greaves from 1994 to 1997. Among other changes in the new constitution, election of future presidents would be for one year only, and at the same time a president-elect would be voted in to gain experience before serving the following year.

By the end of the 1990s, Council committees and sub-committees had been formalised into a relatively complex structure, the aim of which was to reduce the burden on individual Council members and the Consultants' Sub-committee[9]. Instead of setting up committees to deal with specific events or issues which disbanded after fulfilling their function, five nominated committees were established, each with its own sub-committees and budget:

Executive
Professional Standards, Strategic Plan and Constitution, Policy and Procedures Manual, Professional Liaison, Lobbying and Research

Administrative Services
Budget and Finance, Personnel, Elections, Internal Communications

Professional Development
Conference, Awards, Program Activities

Consultants' Policy
Consultant Professional Development, Referral Service, Pathways Supervision

Publications
Journal Editorial, Bulletin Editorial, Promotion and Policy[10].

Despite these changes, Council members still had a high workload, with meetings of sub-committees to attend as well as Council meetings[11].

Administration

The decade to come would also see significant changes in administration, changes which sometimes became sources of tension within the association.

In 1997 Val Sayers retired after two decades as AREA's Administration Officer. AREA President, Daryl Greaves, paid tribute to her central role in many AREA activities, her detailed historical knowledge of the association, and her tolerance and patience in dealing with a wide range of individuals[12].

In the 1998-99 financial year, administration was outsourced to Professional Resources Services (PRS) at an hourly rate. The responsibilities of PRS were to provide general secretarial assistance, keep financial records and provide regular statements to the AREA treasurer and executive, respond to membership enquiries and maintain the membership database, pay accounts, send receipts, and assist with conference organisation[13].

The financial situation began to improve. Recalling the "disastrous" results of 1990 and 1991 and the years when an operating deficit appeared to be an annual event, auditor Humphrey Clegg wrote that "there is now the strongest financial position in the Association's history", and recommended that monthly accounts should in future reflect "actual results" so that Council could be alerted earlier to potential financial problems[14]. As honorary auditor, Humphrey Clegg had seen AREA through its financial ups and downs over many years, and retired in September 1998.

The annual accounts were now running into six figures and greater rigour was needed in financial management, which came under scrutiny when Council

failed to pass the Treasurer's report at two successive meetings because of lack of clarity and difficulty in understanding the present budget format[15]. Accountant Philip Dunmill, whose assistance was sought to develop a new financial system, recommended that AREA switch from cash accounting to accrual accounting, which would provide information about assets and liabilities. Separate budgeting should be introduced at all committee levels and for conferences and publications so that actual expenses could be compared to budgeted expenses[16]. Dunmill also recommended adoption of MYOB software and introduction of monthly management reports for submission to the Treasurer by individual committees. Council agreed to adopt Dunmill's recommendations and to undertake a further review of AREA administration at the April-May Council meeting[17].

Early in 1999 Steven Bowman, Executive Director, Australian Institute of Banking and Finance, prepared a document outlining responsibilities within AREA and offering a framework for operating within the constraints of a voluntary organisation[18]. The document clearly vested power in the Council, while setting out options for members who were not happy with Council decisions, including voting in a new Council, resigning membership, or changing the constitution. The framework was also intended to ensure that Council meetings could focus on strategic rather than operational issues.

Under Nola Firth's presidency a new Strategic Plan was drawn up involving a series of action plans, the aims of which were to ensure greater efficiency in administration, to set timelines, and to clarify responsibility for individual plans[19]. By October 1999, the Executive Committee could report that several targets had already been met, including increased understanding of AREA's financial position, formulation of a budget, a review of the association's structure, and lobbying the government on the GST. Most of the goals of the original Strategic Plan had been achieved, including a conference planned for Queensland, all Council members on email, written contracts for paid workers, financial advice received, Consultant Zone meetings initiated, supervision for Consultants requiring practicum experience, public seminars, and development of the Melbourne University contact. Targets not met were an annual membership growth of 20 per cent, expansion of the Referral Service to all states, provision of information on AREA to all final year students, development of a policy statement, and press responses and lobbying[20].

Further procedures were established to improve efficiency of Council meetings[21], and additional savings were achieved when Council decided not to renew the administrative services contract with PRS. From March 2000 AREA has had a number of contractual arrangements to provide administrative support, including the provision of financial and other information[22].

Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan prepared for 1998-2002 is worth examining in some detail because it covered a comprehensive range of AREA activities[23]. One of the priorities was to attract more members, with a targeted increase in membership of 20 per cent each year to the end of 2001. Key strategies for achieving this target focused on increased interstate as well as Victorian membership, and included maintaining an up-to-date internet site, the annual conference to be held in a state other than Victoria every alternate year, and creating an Australia-wide Referral Service.

Along with increasing membership, professional status and the maintenance of professional standards were seen as essential for the future. AREA had already published a mission statement, a code of ethics and Consultants' guidelines. It had a written constitution and a range of committees to deal with policies and activities such as conferences and professional development. But as the organisation grew there was further room for improvement, and the Strategic Plan saw AREA developing into a more professional association that met standards equal to, or above, those of other professional organisations. Targeted improvements included consistent use of professional meeting procedures, an annual review of organisational structures, the preparation – and use – of procedural manuals for general administration and for operation of the Referral Service, and the use of professional financial practices.

Although expanding membership and increasing professionalism were important, AREA had to continue supporting existing members through its publications and professional development. Both activities had been very successful over the life of AREA, but expectations were increasing for organisations to make greater use of computer technology for communication and training. Consultants were now required to undergo continuing professional development to maintain their registration, and in addition to the website, a target was set to have a unit of study available on the internet by the end of 1999. The Referral Service was currently processing around 600 clients a year on behalf of 160 Consultants. Technology could also assist the planned expansion of the Referral Service by enabling the Referral Officer

to establish links with clients and Consultants in other states, pending appointment of Referral Officers in those states.

Targets for research were modest, and focused mainly on fostering dissemination of current research on learning difficulties at the annual conference, while continuing to publish research articles in the journal. A proposed addition to the journal was to include a quarterly case study written by an AREA member[24].

Increasing membership was a target for promotional activities such as lectures, video presentations, and hand-outs to final year special education students, while contacts with other organisations and promotion of services offered by AREA through the internet, radio, television and newspapers throughout Australia was important for both increasing membership and raising the profile of the association. Finally, the Strategic Plan proposed that lobbying of governments on issues such as eligibility for the Disability Allowance and private insurance or Medicare rebates for children with learning difficulties be strengthened by creation of a group within AREA to write submissions.

All of these strategies were consistent with the aims and objectives of the Australian Resource Educators' Association as set out in its constitution.

A series of action plans was drafted for 2000-2001 to implement the Strategic Plan[25]. These included attendance at an Early Years Literacy Conference in June 2001 with the aims of promoting public awareness of AREA and increasing membership. Under education, proposed activities included negotiation with the Department of Learning and Educational Development at the University of Melbourne for accreditation of professional development implemented by AREA under a 'pathways' program, to begin in semester 2, 2001.

Teacher training

Throughout its history AREA had sought to influence the content of graduate courses in special education through submissions and representation on course committees. By the mid-1990s, many professional associations were requiring increasingly longer periods of study for entry to a profession, and in 1995 the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) called for submissions on the issue of Professional Education and Credentialism. While acknowledging that professional associations were concerned with maintaining high standards within their professions, NBEET was concerned that their involvement could create tensions between professional boards and university autonomy[26]. Daryl Greaves, then President of AREA, and Anne Pringle, as convenor of

the Consultants' Committee, prepared a submission on behalf of AREA[27]. The submission expressed a concern that graduate courses in special education did not ensure that graduates had "sufficient breadth and depth of training in learning disability subjects". It identified areas in which not enough instruction was given, including "developmental factors in learning, identification and diagnosis of cognitive dysfunction, language disorders, neuropsychology of behaviours, research applications in the clinic/ classroom, consulting skills, collaborative teaching, and professional ethics". The last three of these areas were given greatest weight. The submission concluded by indicating that AREA would prefer its Consultant Members to have Master's degrees in special education, including studies in "well researched methods and strategies to assist students with learning disabilities".

In 1998 the committee dealing with ethical issues had been renamed the Professional Standards Sub-Committee[28]. Professional standards also implied that AREA should take a leading role in "the learning disabilities profession" by identifying key competencies, by increasing control of accreditation of Consultants through approval of the content of academic courses in special education, by providing relevant professional training through the association, and by enabling registered Consultants to provide supervision for practicum requirements for membership. Professional organisations were already being given a greater role in specialist postgraduate training, although teacher organisations had been slow to take up the opportunity to influence the content of university-based courses[29].

However, as teachers' colleges merged with universities, the control of teachers over the content of training courses was reduced and less weight was attached to competencies needed to specialise in learning difficulties. 'Inclusion' received its fair share of the blame:

> The move to inclusive education has resulted in a washing away of some of the important specialised skills that were developed in special education facilities which were set up to deal with learning disabilities. Courses for inclusion, of necessity, are concerned with policies, school structures and curriculum modification issues rather than have a strong focus on diagnostic assessment and teaching methods for specific learning difficulties[30].

Nevertheless, Daryl Greaves proposed that AREA, as an organisation concerned with professional standards, should promote a set of competencies it believed necessary for teaching children with learning difficulties:

> This will be accomplished through identifying

the key competencies of such a professional, and through ongoing professional development. This is in line with a Federal Government initiative which appears to strengthen the role of professional organisations so that they encompass standards and professional development . . . in contrast with numerous organisations which have been loose associations of like-minded professionals who have an interest in some particular aspect of education, such as reading, or who have similar roles, such as school principals[31].

Encouraging students continued to be an important way of helping to ensure the future of AREA. In 1996 a Student Awards Scheme was introduced for two students enrolled in tertiary institutions "for an up-to-date paper on any aspect of Specific Learning Disabilities written as part of their course". The award was to include registration at the annual conference, assistance with travel and accommodation, and publication of the paper. Nominations for the award had to come from a member of AREA, and two papers from each institution would be accepted by the judging panel[32].

Professional development

Concerns with training were not restricted to the content of courses in tertiary institutions. In 1996, a Consultants' Professional Development Committee was established as part of the Referral Service to formalise a points system for all Consultants undertaking professional development activities. Consultants were now required to undertake ongoing professional development, and to keep a record of training activities over 12 months in order to maintain their registration with the Referral Service[33]. Procedures for Consultant Members to accrue points for membership renewal took affect from the end of June 1998[34]. Points were allotted on the basis of one point for every hour of professional development, and Consultants were required to accumulate at least 20 points in a year to avoid their registration being suspended. Professional development activities endorsed for this purpose were those related to AREA's mission statement and could include conferences and workshops held in schools, as well as activities organised by AREA[35].

The topics for workshops had changed little, except that with more stringent legal and taxation requirements, workshops dealing with legal advice, accounting in private practice, and running a special education private practice were introduced[36]. A panel of speakers representing law, government and education spoke on discrimination against children with learning difficulties[37]. Assessment, case studies, language

delay, reading, spelling, writing and literacy programs continued to be regular topics; workshops related to behavioural problems, including dealing with emotional difficulties, assertiveness training for students with learning difficulties, and attention deficit disorder were also presented. In June 1997 a weekend Council meeting was followed by a very successful free public seminar on 'starting points for helping students with learning disabilities', attended by over 100 teachers, parents and integration aides[38]. Disability funding was again addressed in 1997, while running a private practice in special education, testing, and report writing were topics of perennial interest. Language delay, spelling, mathematics in the Curriculum Standards Framework, children's writing, testing and assessment, and an assertiveness program for students with specific learning difficulties, occupied the early 2000s, and a seminar on a newly-published program to deal with bullying in schools reflected a widespread concern about this topic.

AREA also supported efforts by teachers to upgrade their qualifications. A 'mini-course' with three modules, teaching students with a learning difficulty, inclusive methodology, and teaching learning disabled students who have difficulty with writing, was trialled in Melbourne, with plans for packaging the course for presentation in other states and country areas[39]. In due course AREA (now LDA) sought accreditation of these modules with the University of Melbourne[40].

Conferences

Conferences were another avenue for professional development, and helped to raise AREA's profile nationally as a more professional approach to conference organisation was adopted. They also helped to attract more members. The 1996 conference was hailed by Daryl Greaves as "the highlight of the year", especially the keynote speakers[41]. Selected papers from this conference were published in book form in five sections: The future for resource educators; Factors related to learning difficulties; Strategies and methods for teaching children with learning difficulties; Practitioner case studies; and Professional services (Greaves & Jeffery, 1997).

Unlike conferences held by single professions, AREA conferences drew on a range of disciplines for contributions. Introducing the 1998 conference to potential participants, the conference convenor, Diane Barwood, stated:

Increasingly, one of the strengths of the conference has been that member perspectives from other disciplines have offered valuable perspectives on

learning difficulties, sharing ideas with teachers who work with students experiencing difficulties with learning. It is hoped that this year such specialists as occupational therapists, psychologists, language pathologists, behavioural optometrists and audiologists will offer papers. We also invite teachers working 'at the coalface' to share experiences, insights and lead discussion on relevant issues. . .[42].

There was, in addition, a resolve by the Executive Committee not to include papers promoting popular programs that lacked a sound research base:

. . . AREA neither advertises or [sic] admits as conference papers those interventions classed . . . as without sound research base. These include sensory integration, educational kinesiology, optometric training, dietary interventions, neuromotor therapy[43].

The three previous conferences had been held in Melbourne, but in 1999 the venue moved to Brisbane, a choice which would have many positive outcomes for the future of AREA in that state. Conferences held interstate helped to reinforce AREA's national identity, but were nevertheless too costly in both organisational time and funding to become an annual event. Council decided to proceed gradually in adopting a program of regular interstate conferences, and to consider instead holding a biennial conference with a smaller, one-day seminar in alternate years[44].

Consultants' Referral Service

By 1998 the number of referrals handled by AREA had reached 755 for the year and by September 1999 averaged five per day[45]. As the Referral Service continued to grow, the Consultant Member Sub-committee played a crucial role, meeting regularly and dealing with such issues as current operations of the service, reviewing new applicants for Consultant Membership, publicity, guidelines, and the professional development program for Consultants[46]. The sub-committee also discussed the issue of remedial versus resource as part of Consultants' professional profile, and the Executive decided to enlist the assistance of an "expert in professional standards", Paul McCann of the Catholic Education Office in Brisbane, on report writing and legal liability[47].

The *Guidelines for AREA Consultants in Private Practice* were still in use, having undergone a number of revisions and reprints since their introduction in 1984. The guidelines now clearly spelt out the procedures to be followed in referrals. If there were several consultants in an area who could match a request, the Referral Officer would supply names and contact details in rotation so that all Consultants would have an

opportunity to be referred. After six weeks' tuition, the Consultant was expected to sign and return a portion of the Referral Confirmation Form with the referral fee – the fee received for one teaching session. Consultants were advised to have parents sign and date a statement agreeing to the services offered and conditions, to avoid any liability problems. A detailed outline for the Consultant's personal record-keeping, which would include identification data, family history, medical history, school history, current assessment, program tasks and child's progress, was suggested. Finally, the *Guidelines* stated that AREA reserved the right to set a recommended fee and expected Consultants to adhere to this fee[48]. This recommendation has been omitted from a recent revision to conform with current legal requirements[49].

New Consultant Members were needed to meet the demand for services, and criteria for registration as a Consultant Member of the association were discussed at the 1997 national conference. Suggestions for amendments to these criteria included the addition of study skills as an area of expertise, a portfolio to demonstrate competence in instruction in the learning disabilities area as an alternative to a specified time of experience, and categorisation of Consultants for referrals in their area of specialisation (for example, speech pathology). Consultants recommended that the special education component remain an essential qualification, although some members questioned whether core subjects rather than a full diploma or degree could be identified as necessary[50].

As a further means of expanding Consultant Membership, a model of supervision was adopted similar to that operating in the Australian Psychological Society (APS). Under this model, applicants who did not have sufficient practical experience to meet Consultant Membership requirements would be able to undergo supervised training in practical skills[51]. The Consultant Policy Committee organised a workshop for potential AREA supervisors with two APS members who were experienced in this type of training. A limited number of participants would be accepted for the first course, which would in turn enable them to prepare other experienced Consultants for their role as supervisors of suitable applicants for Consultant Membership. AREA supervisors could also provide relevant experience in their place of employment for students completing courses in special education.

The role of the supervisor would be to oversee work performed by the applicant or student in special education, and to assist in the development of professional skills in testing and teaching learning disabled students. For Consultant applicants, legal

issues, professional ethics and communication with other professionals would also be covered[52].

To provide more support for existing Consultants, Consultant Zones were established early in 1999[53]. These were a more organised successor to the Consultant Support Group meetings begun in 1994. The aim was for Consultants to meet in their own locality to share practical ideas for teaching. Groups of ten Consultant Members were drawn up according to postcode and a leader appointed for each group. Leaders were responsible for contacting each consultant on their list, organising meetings, and keeping records of attendance. New Consultants were assigned to a nearby zone and contacted by the leader. Groups usually met in members' homes, usually once per term. The discussion could be led by one member, or be a group discussion on a chosen topic. Networking was an important part of the meetings.

Zones were initially successful, with 17 zones operating in Victoria by early 2003[54]. Difficulties in maintaining leadership, however, have meant that the number of zones has fluctuated, and there appear to be eight currently active[55].

Submissions and lobbying

Lack of support by education authorities for students with learning disabilities was still an issue, and a motion was passed by Council in September 1998 that AREA continue to make submissions on behalf of these students. Of particular concern was a perceived emphasis on the medical model for defining those eligible to receive the Child Disability Allowance[56].

Two state reviews of public education provided opportunities to put this resolve into action. An AREA submission, prepared by Nola Firth, was made to a Ministerial Working Party on Public Education: The Next Generation (Accountability and Development Division) on future educational needs in Victoria. The submission made five recommendations: that all schools should have a written policy for dealing with learning difficulties; that learning difficulties should be included as a criterion for eligibility for disability and impairments funding; that support should be maintained throughout the whole of school life; that every school should employ a teacher with advanced specialist knowledge of learning difficulties, and that professional development for teachers in the area of learning difficulties should be increased[57]. These recommendations were seen as needing urgent implementation to achieve goals of school retention and equality of opportunity for students with learning difficulties.

AREA also responded to an invitation from the Adult and Family Association of NSW to make a submission to an Independent Inquiry into the Provision of Public Education in NSW. The general terms of reference were to consider the purposes and values of public education in society, and the resources and structures necessary to achieve these purposes and values. In her response the President, Sylvia Byers, indicated that AREA planned to have a NSW representative on Council from September 2001[58]. Another submission in 2001 was to the Ministerial Advisory Committee for the Victorian Institute of Teaching, supporting the establishment of the institute[59].

Introduction by the Federal Government of a $700 voucher system for 'failing readers' in mid-2004 sparked a critical response from AREA (now LDA) for lack of consultation with appropriate researchers regarding the needs of these students and the reasons for their failure (de Lemos & Galletly, 2004). The short timeline for setting up and completing the scheme, the lack of a clearly defined procedure for evaluating its effectiveness, insufficient time to train tutors and inflexibility in not allowing for more cost-effective group tutoring were further aspects of the scheme that drew criticism. Moreover, the subsequent delay in setting up the scheme would mean that assessment results on which the vouchers were to be allocated would be out of date. Indeed, as de Lemos and Galletly pointed out, the fact that the scheme was seen as necessary reflected the lack of provision for students with specific learning difficulties since the abolition of specialist support centres.

Consistent with previous submissions to government by AREA, these criticisms of the voucher scheme drew attention to the difficulties experienced in obtaining appropriate services and support for both students and teachers. But de Lemos and Galletly also criticised the scheme for its lack of recognition of the underlying causes of reading difficulties and related outcomes.

Nor did the voucher scheme resolve the more fundamental question of methods currently in use for teaching reading, which had been debated over several issues of the *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities* (see Part 5 in this series). This question had been raised in a letter initiated and drafted by Molly de Lemos and Kevin Wheldall and signed by a group of 26 leading academic experts on reading, which was sent to the then Federal Minister for Education, Dr Brendan Nelson. The letter, also published in the *Australian Higher Education Supplement* of 21 April 2004, pointed out that methods currently in use for the teaching of reading in schools had not taken into account research into reading over the past 20 years, which had concluded that "mastery of the alphabetic code is essential to proficient reading":

. . . Reading instruction in Australia is based largely on the whole language approach, which makes the assumption that learning to read is like learning to speak, and requires only exposure to a rich language environment without any specific teaching of the alphabetic system and letter-sound relationships. However, the research on reading development has shown clearly that this is not the case, and that the ability to read is a complex learned skill that requires specific teaching[60].

The letter went on to request a specific review of research evidence relating to the teaching of reading.

The debate about phonics versus whole language spilled over into the *LDA Bulletin*. The first issue of 2005 reproduced part of the transcript of an ABC Radio interview by Norman Swan with Reid Lyon, an outspoken critic of the whole language approach to the teaching of reading. A 'belated' response to the LDA letter by Minister for Education, Brendan Nelson, was announced in the form of an inquiry into reading instruction, its terms of reference to examine how reading is taught in schools, how teachers are trained to teach literacy, and how reading is assessed. But, as de Lemos (2005) pointed out, the committee set up to undertake the review was largely made up of education administrators, teacher educators, and teacher and parent representatives, but did not include reading specialists. A quote from Max Coltheart made the point: "How children learn to read is not a matter of opinion. It is like any other scientific research . . . but none of the people on the committee are scientists who do research on reading" (p. 6). In the same issue, Wheldall (2005) deplored the "political correctness" of the whole language approach by educators who downgraded the value of fluent reading as a necessary skill in favour of "critical literacy" that made demands on children's critical powers well beyond their years.

A submission to the Inquiry into the Teaching of Reading, prepared by Kevin Wheldall and Sylvia Byers, again called on the committee to base its model of initial and remedial reading on the scientific research literature. The submission pointed out that the scientific community now acknowledged that reading is phonics-based and that the development of phonological sensitivity is necessary, although not sufficient, for learning to read. The authors argued that phonics methods must replace methods currently used for the teaching of reading, even though the latter may be based on sincerely held views, and that evidence-based practices at both initial teacher training and through professional development would lead to improvements in overall literacy standards, would help to reduce the need for expensive but relatively ineffective school literacy programs such as Reading Recovery, and would release more time and resources for students whose reading difficulties were more intractable[61].

Learning Difficulties Australia

The name of AREA represented neither its aims nor its activities and had been a cause of dissatisfaction for some years. Council members were asked to submit suggestions for clarifying the name, and the issue was thrown open to the membership when almost the whole of the May 2001 *LDA Bulletin* was devoted to exploring a possible name change[62]. 'Remedial' had been an accurate description when the association was founded, but by the 1990s had been replaced by 'resource', when some special educators began to be called resource teachers and worked in resource rooms. Confusion arising from ambiguity in the use of 'resource' had led to adoption of a new title for the journal that more accurately reflected the interests and purpose of AREA on the international scene: the *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*, a title that was not consistent with the name of the association. Members' views were sought on options: retain the present name, with or without an added tag identifying the fact that members worked in the field of learning disabilities; change the name to Australian Association of Learning Disabilities; or revert to the old title, Australian Remedial Education Association. Other options would be considered.

The views of several key members who had participated in past discussions about name change were presented. Arguments in favour of change were the confusion created by the existing name and the fact that it did not clearly reflect the interests of either members or their clients. Arguments against change were the established identity of the association, especially the acronym AREA, and the difficulty of reaching an agreed definition of learning disability if that concept were to become part of the title.

Minutes of the AGM held on 1 September 2001 reported that members voted to change the name of the association to Learning Difficulties Australia. The vote was not unanimous, but some older members had been swayed in favour of change by newer members and by the argument that the association could no longer represent only remedial or resource teachers as schools embraced the inclusion model[63]. An Executive Committee report noted that "AREA became officially known as Learning Difficulties Australia when Consumer and Business Affairs Victoria changed our registration" and that "Wendy [Scott] sought support of people on the Executive in making this decision as an accurate reflection of the wishes of those members

voting at the AGM on the name change"[64]. At the next Council meeting it was pointed out that members had not agreed to this name but had in fact voted against it and in favour of 'Learning Differences/ Difficulties/ Disabilities Australia'. However, registration did not allow this title. A motion "that the association name be changed to the LDA – Learning Difficulties Inc. Australia (formerly AREA)" was carried. Common sense prevailed, and, as the minutes reported: "It was thought that this name better describes who we are. The association has changed and grown and the name change is a reflection of this."[65]

With the change of name there was a new mission statement, now less ambiguous but still emphasising the role of the educator: "Learning Difficulties Australia Inc. is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to representing, resourcing and promoting professional educators so that the highest level of service can be provided to individuals experiencing learning difficulties."

There were also changes to the *LDA Bulletin*, which was the main avenue for communicating with members. It now adopted a much more pro-active role. An inaugural meeting of the Bulletin Editorial Committee identified two main objectives:

Objective 1. To refine our understanding of the target readership. The *Bulletin* is an ideal way to increase our profile in the community and invite more members. It represents LDA as a research-based professional organisation with exemplary ethical and educational standards existing for the benefit of professionals, practitioners, students and their families. Objective 2. To provide an active and lively networking organ for the members of LDA, with the emphasis being on participation by the rank and file.[66]

To achieve these objectives the format as well as the content had to be attractive. Suggestions for content included letters to the editor, readers' contributions on practical activities and resources, investigative reports on programs targeting learning disabled students, internet and journal articles, previews of papers to be published later in the journal, a schools corner presenting exemplary programs of successful intervention, non-refereed papers, advertisements, publicity for programs which reflected LDA policy, information on the professional development program and short accounts of activities, and discussion and debate relating to LDA sub-committees. Other proposals included Zone profiles, logbook procedures for Consultants under supervision, and ongoing issues such as insurance[67]. In August 2005, Kevin Wheldall, now Executive Editor of LDA Publications, announced that the *LDA Bulletin* was to be expanded and transformed into a "practitioner focused magazine-style publication reporting news, exploring opinions, reviewing books, resources and software, and providing updates on topics of interest within the field of LD"[68] (p. 1). It is now a glossy, attractive publication with substantial and interesting articles.

Conclusion

From its beginning over 40 years ago as the Diagnostic and Remedial Teachers Association of Victoria (DRTAV), Learning Difficulties Australia has made some significant achievements. Foremost among these has been the continuing support offered to specialist teachers, especially those working on an individual basis, as they have battled for recognition. The history of the association contains numerous stories of skilled and dedicated teachers who have made a difference in the lives of children with learning difficulties, despite governments and education authorities that have seemed at best indifferent, at worst, even obstructive.

Working behind the scenes, there has been an equally dedicated Council and Executive, operating a Referral Service, lobbying and preparing submissions, publishing a respected journal and regular news bulletin, organising conferences and professional development, and setting professional standards for specialist teachers in private practice.

A major achievement of the past ten years has been an increase in interstate activity, assisted greatly by email contacts, but also reflected in conferences held in other states, and election of presidents from states other than Victoria. There has been an increased involvement of academic researchers.

Yet there is much that has not changed. A summary of responses to a member survey in 2002 suggests that both the definition of learning difficulties, and the problems faced by students who are referred to the association, are no different from those encountered by the original members of the DRTAV[69]. It is still a fact that a significant proportion of children in the education system at any given time is likely to experience difficulty in dealing with the demands of a literate society, while both funding, and effective, research-based programs remain elusive.

Membership fluctuates, but the association remains small by the standards of most professional societies. Within the association, internal tensions still exist. This is by no means a negative, because without such tensions organisations can become complacent. Wheldall (2006a; 2006b) has continued to push for an end to educational innovations that are not backed by sound research, especially in reading. He points

out that improving literacy is not necessarily a matter of more funding but is rather a matter of attitude. A more balanced approach to the teaching of literacy can incorporate both whole language and phonics methods, along with other aspects of reading.

In October 2000, the then President, Sylvia Byers, tried to imagine the learning difficulties scene in 2050 with some pertinent questions:

. . . will people still have difficulties with learning? Will there still be a need for an association such as AREA to represent professionals working with these people? Will there still be a need to improve the status of these professionals? How well will people understand learning difficulties? . . . Will there still be a need to lobby for improved services?[70]

More sophisticated technology and a greater understanding of both brain-behaviour relationships and environmental impact on learning may help to increase our understanding of learning difficulties. But if the past 40 years are a guide, it is safe to say that the answer to the other questions will be 'yes'. Learning Difficulties Australia will still be needed.

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