It is with great pleasure that I write my first ‘From the President’ for LDA. I officially became President at the LDA AGM held in November in Melbourne. At this meeting we also welcomed two new members of LDA Council. First, Anne Castles from Macquarie University, yet another eminent dyslexia researcher that LDA has been lucky enough to attract to its ranks. We were also pleased to welcome back to Council Elaine McLeish, with her depth of expertise and understanding of the issues facing LDA Consultant members. Elaine will be well known to Consultant members in her role as Victorian Referral Officer. The AGM also saw Louise Mercer become President-Elect, and Max Coltheart move to his role as Immediate Past President. Craig Wright continues as Treasurer and we are grateful that Molly de Lemos continues to give LDA her boundless energy and drive. Combine these individuals with the experience and wisdom of the remainder of Council, and the capable efficiency of Kerrie McMahon as Administration Officer, and I feel very lucky to be working with such a great team.

An opportunity to reflect
The LDA AGM was also an opportunity to reflect on what LDA had achieved over the past year. As I am sure you are aware, there were two major events: the biennial combined conference of LDA, SPELD Qld and RSTAQ in Brisbane, which had the theme ‘Consult and Collaborate – A Holistic Approach to Learning Needs’, and the LDA Seminar in Melbourne ‘Effective Reading Instruction for All: National and International Perspectives’. Part of the success of these events can be attributed to the presentations by Sir Jim Rose (plus, of course, the tireless energy and efficiency of the organising teams). LDA instigated and organised Sir Jim’s visit to Australia, and with six meetings/presentations across the country with professionals, professional organisations, politicians and media, we can certainly consider the visit a success. It will undoubtedly have raised awareness of the critical issues faced in our quest to achieve universal effective literacy and greater understanding of current views on what constitutes best practice. Reports on many of the events that Sir Jim participated in appeared in the final Bulletin of last year (Vol 41, 3&4), and a report on the Brisbane

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LDA Mission Statement
Learning Difficulties Australia is an association of teachers and other professionals dedicated to improving the performance of underachieving students through effective teaching practices based on scientific research both in the classroom and through individualised instruction.

For more details of LDA activities, professional development opportunities and publications, visit our website at www.ldaustralia.org

Articles and advertising in the Bulletin do not necessarily reflect the opinions or carry the endorsements of the Association
### Bulletin – April 2010

#### Membership of LDA Council 2009/2010

**OFFICE BEARERS**

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<th>Position</th>
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<td>President</td>
<td>Lyndsey Nickels</td>
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<td>Louise Mercer</td>
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<td>Immediate Past President</td>
<td>Max Coltheart</td>
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<td>Craig Wright</td>
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**COUNCIL MEMBERS**

- Margaret Cameron (SA)
- Anne Castles (NSW)
- Joan Cooper (Vic)
- Ruth Fielding-Barnsley (TAS)
- Alison Madelaine (NSW)
- Elaine McLeish (VIC)
- Barbara Nielsen (SA)
- Jan Roberts (Vic)
- Pye Twaddell (NSW)

**COMMITTEES AND CONVENORS**

- **Executive/Management Group**
  - Convenor: Lyndsey Nickels
- **Administration Committee**
  - Convenor: Molly de Lemos
- **Publications Committee**
  - Convenor: Alison Madelaine
- **Consultants’ Committee**
  - Convenor: Jan Roberts

**PUBLICATIONS**

- Journal Editors: Kevin Wheldall and Alison Madelaine
- Journal Associate Editor: Ruth Fielding-Barnsley
- *Bulletin* Editors: Molly de Lemos, Margaret Cameron, and Craig Wright

**WEBSITE**

- Website Editor: Margaret Cameron
- Webmaster: David Tehan

**REFERRAL SERVICE**

- Referral Officer, Victoria: Elaine McLeish

**ADMINISTRATION**

- Administration Officer: Kerrie McMahon

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#### LDA Notices

**Victorian Program of Workshops for Consultants 2010**

All members of LDA, as well as non-LDA members, are welcome to attend.

**Sunday 25 July, 10:00am to 12:00pm, followed by a cuppa and chat**

**Topic:** The Andrew Dean Fildes Foundation for Language and Learning Disabilities

**Speaker:** Andrew Fildes

**Venue:** To be advised

**Fees for the above Workshop**

- $25 for Consultant members of LDA.
- $30 for non-Consultant members of LDA.
- $10 for student members of LDA.
- $40 for non-members of LDA.

**Booking for the Workshop**

It is important that you book in advance by either by credit card, cheque or EFT and pay in advance. The late fee for at the door payment will be an extra $10.

Booking forms can be downloaded from the LDA website at ldaustralia.org, or contact either Kerrie McMahon, ldaquery@bigpond.net.au or Jan Roberts, learningpathway@optusnet.com.au, 03 9850 7465 to obtain a booking form.

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Conference appears in this issue. All of the reports can also be found on the LDA website, along with links to presentations of all the speakers in Melbourne and Brisbane. Finally, for those unable to attend the Melbourne event, LDA has funded the production of a DVD of all the presentations and the discussion forum at the Melbourne Seminar. This DVD has now been mailed out to all members of LDA.

**Honours for Max**

I am sure that all of LDA would like to thank Max Coltheart for his hard work for LDA and for people with learning difficulties. His exceptional and longstanding contribution was acknowledged recently in the Australia Day Honours List, when he received the Member of the Order of Australia for “service to cognitive psychology as a researcher and academic, and to people with learning difficulties”. However, even this prestigious award also was not without things (albeit minor and amusing) to remind us of the symptoms of learning difficulties: at one point in an article celebrating Max’s achievements, our local paper referred to dyslexia as ‘dyslexism’! My son (who does not have a learning disability) when reading the paper aloud quoted it as saying “Max Coltheart has been a bacon of hope for people with a disability”! Luckily, this is not yet another treatment for dyslexia (or even for dyslexism) that is unsupported by scientific evidence (“Bacon hailed as miracle cure”?!!) but merely a reminder that even skilled readers can be tripped up occasionally by words or phrases they are not familiar with – Max was of course heralded as a beacon of hope.

**A National Action Agenda for Dyslexia**

On a more serious note, Max has been active in top-level discussions with politicians and policy-makers that can only benefit people with learning disabilities. In particular, we all were pleased when it was announced that
Max was to chair the Working Party on Dyslexia that was to propose a national agenda for action to assist people with dyslexia. The Working Party consulted widely and comments on a draft report were made by, amongst others, members of LDA council. The final report made 19 recommendations designed to improve access and equity in the everyday lives of the 5–10 per cent of Australian children and adults with dyslexia, and a copy is available from the LDA website. Here, I briefly summarise the key points.

The Working Party (WP) report begins by quoting evidence for Australia having a problem with levels of literacy. For example, COAG considers relatively high proportions of working age Australians to have literacy and numeracy skills below the minimum level required to meet the complex demands of work and life in modern economies – 43.5 per cent for literacy and 49.8 per cent for numeracy.

The WP report then asks the question ‘Why is there a literacy problem in Australia?’ It referred here to the findings of the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (NITL, 2005) and particularly focused on the lack of adequate preparation for the classroom teacher. For example, most teacher training programs devoted an extremely small amount of curriculum time to the teaching of reading (50 per cent of courses devoted less than 5 per cent of curriculum), most beginning teachers don’t feel confident about their ability to teach reading, and most senior teachers don’t feel beginning teachers are equipped to teach reading. The NITL made 20 recommendations, of which none have been implemented to date. In essence, the WP report concludes that with, amongst other things, adequate teacher training and systematic, evidence-based teaching techniques at the level of the classroom, there will be substantial improvements in average literacy levels in Australian schools and the literacy problem in Australia would be greatly reduced.

The WP report draws the distinction between “instructional casualties” and “people with dyslexia”. Those individuals who, had they received systematic and explicit classroom reading instruction, would have become successful readers are “instructional casualties”. They are distinguished from the students who, even with the highest quality, evidence-based teaching in the classroom would still fail to read at a level appropriate for their general ability – these children are those defined as dyslexic. The report makes clear the serious consequences of failure to learn to read – economic, social and personal, before going on to make its recommendations. These recommendations are to do with reducing the (functional) impact of dyslexia, and about how people with dyslexia can be assisted earlier and more effectively. The WP suggest that this can be done through:

- Officially recognizing dyslexia as a disability;
- High quality literacy instruction;
- School-based dyslexia resilience programs;
- Improving current teachers’ knowledge, skills and understandings;
- Improved training courses for future teachers;
- Access to early assessment and identification;
- Appropriate support and accommodations, including the establishment of an Accessible Instructional Material Centre (AIMC) whose first task will be to facilitate the development of a national Accessible Instructional Material Strategy (AIMS);
- Dyslexia-friendly schools and workplaces; and,
- Increased community awareness”.

The 19 WP recommendations are tailored to achieve these goals. Members interested in the details should read the report in full, which can be downloaded from the LDA website. Members with comments or who wish to lend their support to the report are urged to write directly to the Hon. Bill Shorten, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services, via his website (www.billshorten.com.au). We all sincerely hope that the effort that has gone into preparing this report is rewarded with Government action.

LDA in 2010

LDA is committed to influencing politicians and policymakers at every opportunity, to further the cause of effective literacy instruction and effective support for individuals with learning difficulties. Already this year we have made a submission to the NSW Parliament, which is conducting an inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs attending primary or secondary schools. We also intend that LDA should play a part in the consultation process for the new National Curriculum for English and the Queensland Government’s ideas on the future of education in Queensland, following the recent release of the paper ‘A Flying Start for Queensland Children’. In sum, 2009 was a busy year for LDA but with positive outcomes. In 2010 we aim to capitalise on these outcomes and continue with new initiatives. Keep an eye on the website for updates!

Lyndsey Nickels, President, LDA

LDA Bulletin Online

The LDA Bulletin is now available online, for members of LDA only. See Members Only section of the LDA website, www.ldaustralia.org
The presentations of the 2009 LDA Awards took place following the AGM in Melbourne on 7 November.

Dr Kathy Rowe accepted the Mona Tobias Award on behalf of her late husband, Dr Ken Rowe. On accepting the Award Kathy spoke about Ken’s work, and how his passion for understanding how people, but especially children, learned and what constituted a ‘good teacher’ and ‘good teaching practice’ drove his research. His particular concern was that conclusions from educational research should be reliable, by ensuring that the research design and analyses of the data were appropriate, were matched to the type of data and accounted for measurement error, as well as the hierarchical nature of educational data. These factors were crucial for ensuring that educational theories of teaching and learning that formed the basis for teaching programs had a solid evidence base before they were introduced into teaching practices.

The Bruce Wicking Award was presented to Lyn Henshall, known to many of her Melbourne colleagues for her work in developing programs for students with learning and language disabilities at Tintern Anglican Girls’ Grammar School and subsequently at St Catherine’s School in Melbourne. In accepting the award, Lyn reflected on her career in special education, noting that it is a difficult area which is not well understood, and needs conviction and endurance to succeed. She felt that she had been fortunate to have worked in situations where the area of learning difficulties had been seen as important, and was well resourced and supported, so that the assistance given to students had been effective. She also paid tribute to her colleagues, who had brought their own special expertise to the job and had shared with her a common goal and a belief in evidence based research.

The Tertiary Student Award was presented to Dr Saskia Kohnen, who then gave a brief presentation on her PhD research study on the remediation of spelling disorders in children. This study used a single case study approach to examine the nature of treatment effects and their mechanisms. The study was based on cognitive neuropsychological methods, and found that the treatment was not only effective but also long-lasting, and led to improved spelling of irregular words using a simple delayed copying and spelling to dictation method. Implications arising from the study with regard to the selection of words for training were discussed.
Professor Lyndsey Nickels: A profile

Lyndsey Nickels is the LDA President for 2010. She brings to this role both depth and breadth of knowledge. Originally from the UK, she has been in Australia for 14 years, based at Macquarie University’s Macquarie Centre for Cognitive Science (MACCS). She is a speech pathologist by profession, although currently a full-time researcher funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council. She worked clinically with both adults and children with language impairments before moving into research over 20 years ago.

Her research takes an approach known as cognitive neuropsychology. In this field, cognitive theories are tested using the patterns of problems shown by individuals with cognitive impairments. For example, theories of reading can be tested using the patterns shown by children with reading problems. However, cognitive neuropsychology also uses these same theories to help us understand the cognitive impairments better. For example, knowing that in cognitive theories of reading there are two ways a skilled reader can read a word (by recalling the pronunciation from memory, or by converting each letter to its component sound), can help us to understand why there are some children who, despite having good phonics skills, can still have problems reading fluently (i.e., they have a problem with storing and recalling the pronunciations of words from long-term memory). Finally, cognitive neuropsychology has a role to play in intervention. First, through identifying exactly what the underlying problem is that needs fixing for each individual and targeting that problem (rather than using a ‘one size fits all’ approach). It also has a role in helping us to identify how interventions are working, again by looking at the effects within the cognitive theories.

Lyndsey’s research has encompassed all three aspects of cognitive neuropsychology, but she is particularly well-recognised for her research in intervention. The other feature of cognitive neuropsychology is that it works at the level of the individual and not of the group. Hence, Lyndsey’s intervention research has consisted of single case studies and case series (multiple single cases using the same techniques to ensure replicability). These studies all use careful methodology and statistics to enable us to be sure that any improvements seen as a result of the intervention are ‘real’ and cannot be due to placebo or practice effects. Recent publications in this area have been in collaboration with Dr Saskia Kohnen and investigated the effects of intervention for children with poor spelling. Lyndsey has a strong commitment to ensuring that current research is translated into best practice for clinicians and teachers and, to this end, often presents her research at conferences and workshops both within Australia and worldwide.

LDA Awards 2010: Call for nominations

Members of LDA are invited to submit nominations for the 2010 Mona Tobias and Bruce Wicking Awards. Applications are also called for the 2010 LDA Tertiary Student Award. The closing date for nominations and applications is Monday 31 May 2010. These Awards are open to both members and non-members of LDA. LDA reserves the right not to confer an Award.

The LDA Awards are designed to recognise outstanding work in the field of learning difficulties.

**The Mona Tobias Award**

The Mona Tobias Award is by nomination, and is presented in recognition of an outstanding contribution to the field of learning difficulties in Australia. This contribution may be in the area of leadership, research, practice or teacher and community education.

Emily Mona Tobias, B.E.M., died in 1980 at the age of 74 years. She was acknowledged for her exceptional skills as a teacher and her devotion to children with learning difficulties. Mona took early retirement from the Victorian Education Department to study learning disabilities under Sam Clements at the University of Arkansas. This led to her second career where she influenced many teachers and parents of students with learning difficulties. The Mona Tobias Award commemorates the pioneering work of Mona Tobias in helping children and adults with learning difficulties.

**The Bruce Wicking Award**

The Bruce Wicking Award is by nomination, and is presented to an individual or an organisation in recognition of innovative programs or practices relating to the teaching of children with learning difficulties. Bruce Wicking established the Currajong School in 1974, and was committed to the provision of programs which catered for the individual needs of children with learning difficulties. The funds for this award are provided through the generosity of the Wicking family and their friends to commemorate the life and work of Bruce Wicking.

**The Tertiary Student Award**

The LDA Tertiary Student Award is by application, and is presented in recognition of significant research which advances the understanding of theoretical and practical issues in the field of learning difficulties, carried out by a student in the course of their tertiary level studies. The award is based on the submission of a research article to LDA, which will be considered for publication in the *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*.

Further information regarding the Awards and nomination procedures are provided on the LDA website, at www.ldaustralia.org.
Helping people with dyslexia: a national action agenda

During 2008, the Hon. Bill Shorten, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services, met with representatives from dyslexia interest groups who expressed concern that dyslexia is not recognised as a specific disability under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and that the education and employment systems do not recognise or support people with dyslexia.

Following these meetings the Parliamentary Secretary requested the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) to convene a roundtable forum to discuss these issues.

This Dyslexia Stakeholder Forum was held at Parliament House, Canberra on 16 June 2009. The forum consisted of 24 people who are scientists in the areas of reading or learning disabilities, technologists, people with dyslexia, clinicians and practitioners, or representatives from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and FaHCSIA. It was decided that a representative Working Party of eight forum members should be formed, charged with the task of writing a report proposing a national agenda for action to assist people with dyslexia.

The Working Party, chaired by Professor Max Coltheart, immediate Past President of LDA, consulted widely and in particular benefited from comments on a draft report that were received from members of LDA Council, as well as various other people and organisations, including AUSPELD (The Australian Federation of Specific Learning Difficulty Associations), ALDA (The Australian Learning Disability Association), Speech Pathology Australia, the DDOQL (Developmental Disorders of Language and Literacy) network, and Sir Jim Rose, author of the Rose Report on Dyslexia, commissioned by the UK Government.

The full report of the Working Party can be downloaded from the LDA website at ldaustralia.org. Members with comments or who wish to lend their support to the report are urged to write directly to the Hon. Bill Shorten, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services, via his website (www.billshorten.com.au).

Consult and Collaborate: a report on the Joint LDA/ SPELD/RSTAQ Conference

Rob Murray, Conference Coordinator

The Biennial Joint Conference was held at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre on 18 and 19 September 2009. The theme of Consult and Collaborate – A Holistic Approach to Learning Needs – provided the platform for a wide-ranging group of presenters. Organised by a joint committee from LDA, SPELD and RSTAQ (now LSTAQ), 18 months of planning and organising resulted in a two-day feast of research reports, practitioner hints and tips, and networking. Sponsorship was provided by Education Queensland as a major sponsor and 5energies as the satchel sponsor.

The conference was lead by two international speakers:
- Professor Maggie Snowling, University of York – opened the conference with a paper on ‘Dyslexia and Language Impairment: Risk and Protective Factors’.
- Professor Charles Hulme, University of York – followed on Day two with ‘Addressing Interventions for Reading and Language Impairments’.

LDA sponsored a third international speaker with respected educationalist, Sir Jim Rose, providing an insight into his 2006 Review of the Teaching of Early Reading at the end of Day one.

With over 300 attendees from most states of Australia and New Zealand, the conference was seen as a major success. Attendees were treated to a range of topics from academics and practitioners. Many sessions were hands-on to build on theories presented. A number of the presenters provided their material for publishing on the conference website - www.speld.org.au/?q=node/10. In addition to the broad range of presenters, 17 exhibitors demonstrated support tools ranging from computer software and books through to a variety of educational testing tools.

On day one, attendees were treated to a lunch time choral performance as 5energies launched a new CD with the assistance of 25 children from a local school. They certainly brightened the day and introduced some life to the Convention Centre. Based on the feedback received during and after the conference, attendees enjoyed the experience and will be watching out for the next conference scheduled for 2011.
Predicting generalisation in irregular word spelling: a single case study

Saskia Kohnen, Recipient of the LDA Tertiary Student Award, 2009

In this article Saskia provides a summary of her research investigating the mechanisms underlying generalisation of treatment benefits to untrained words in spelling.

This study was designed to investigate the cognitive mechanisms underlying generalisation in irregular word spelling. There are only a few studies which directly investigate generalisation effects in irregular word spelling, most of which have been conducted with adults who experienced spelling problems after a brain injury.

It is important to understand the mechanisms underlying treatment generalisation in order to maximise treatment outcomes. That is, if we can predict which irregular words are likely to improve without specific training, we can design more efficient training programs. In the only previous study investigating generalisation effects in irregular word spelling with a child, Brunsdon et al. (2005) found that not all words generalise. Words that improved without specific training shared two features: (1) they were high in frequency of occurrence, and (2) the misspelling that KM made prior to training was very similar to the correct spelling.

Study 1

Our study was a single case model-based intervention carried out with a Year 4 student in a mainstream primary school. KM presented with a selective deficit in spelling irregular words like, for example, friend, group, please. Her phonics-based spelling was within the normal range for her age and so was her reading. Our training study consisted of two parts. In the first part, we replicated the findings of Brunsdon et al. (2005). Two questions guided this research: (1) Would we be able to find generalisation for untrained irregular words in another child with developmental spelling difficulties? (2) If so, what would be the factors determining generalisation in the case of KM?

In our first training study with KM, we found that generalisation occurred for a significant proportion of the untrained words. There were three characteristics that were shared by these words: (1) they were high in frequency of occurrence, (2) they had many orthographic neighbours, (3) the misspelling that KM made prior to training was very similar to the correct spelling.

Study 2

In the second part of the study, we tried to actively predict generalisation using these three variables. In study 2, we trained one set (set 1) of words and left three other sets untrained. One of the untrained sets (set 2) was low on the three predictor variables (i.e., written frequency, neighbourhood size, error-target similarity) and hence, we did not expect to find generalisation for set 2. However, sets 3 and 4 were high on the predictor variables ‘written frequency’ and ‘neighbourhood size’. Hence, we expected sets 3 and 4 to show improvement without specific training. In addition, set 4 contained words whose misspellings were closer to being correct than was the case for the words in any of the other sets. We wanted to know if this would be of additional benefit, that is, would set 4 show more improvement than set 3?

The results of the second study showed that (1) there was no generalisation for set 2, (2) sets 3 and 4 both showed generalisation, and (3) set 4 did not show more generalisation than set 3.

Conclusions

This study was the first to actively predict generalisation in irregular word spelling. Two factors were especially important: frequency of occurrence and neighbourhood size. The similarity of spelling errors to the target spelling did not lead to more generalisation. The results were best accounted for by what could be called the Feedback-Account of generalisation: generalisation occurs due to a feedback mechanism. This feedback mechanism comes into play when the letters of a word are held active in the orthographic short-term memory. While the letters that make up a word are held active in the short-term memory component (e.g., trap), other words that include these letters (e.g., tray, tram, drap, etc) are activated in the orthographic lexicon at the same time. This occurs via a feedback loop. In addition, since high frequency words are activated faster, they are more likely to benefit from the feedback activation. The Feedback-Account explains neatly why generalisation is more likely to occur for words with high frequency and neighbourhood size.

Clinical implications from this research concern the selection of training words. Overall, it seems that training effects could be maximised.

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if training is focused on words with lower frequency of occurrence and lower neighbourhood sizes. High frequency words with many neighbours can be left untreated and their possible generalisation should be monitored. However, we require more research to test these predictions in clinical practice.

References


Footnote
1 An orthographic neighbour of a word is another word that only differs from the first word in one letter; for example, ‘worm’ has 10 neighbours, including ‘form, warm, wore, work’.
Email: saskia.kohnen@mq.edu.au

A position of equity

Pye Twaddell

Australia has no definitive national policy governing assessment and learning assistance to support students with significant learning difficulties such as those from the learning disability dyslexia (which affects up to 10 per cent of children and adults1), despite a history of relevant legislation, inquiries and programs aimed at implementing an equitable position of access to curriculum requirements for all. This article chronicles examples of this history to demonstrate compelling evidence that should underpin legal and responsible policy on the part of all jurisdictions to establish and fund an equitable framework of education service provision in support of:

- Access to appropriate assessment and learning assistance for students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia, regardless of cause and potential for achievement, at all levels of education;
- Appropriate initial training and ongoing professional development for their teachers;
- Access to evidence-based resources for these students and adults, and for their teachers; and,
- Further research.

In 1992, the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act2 (DDA) was enacted. With reference to learning, the DDA states a disability means:

(f) a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction; and includes a disability that:
(h) presently exists; or
(i) previously existed but no longer exists; or
(j) may exist in the future.

In 1992, while literacy problems were not automatically accepted as constituting or resulting from a disability, failure to provide reasonable adjustments for those with a learning disability could be considered discriminatory under the DDA, including failure to provide adjustments because the disability was not recognised when reasonably it could have been. These issues triggered a political learning disability/difficulty funding debate, which has yet to be resolved.

In 1996, the NSW McRae Integration/Inclusion Feasibility Study reported that the critical matter for educators is to respond not to disability or disorder but to educational need as it presents.3 In 2000, the Commonwealth Mapping the Territory, Primary Students with Learning Difficulties document spoke of the need in every school for at least one specialist with advanced knowledge in the area of learning difficulties, and the ineffectiveness of one-off professional development activities.4

However, also in 2000, the skills to effectively teach students with learning difficulties were not considered sufficiently specialised to warrant even a mention in the Commonwealth Quality Teaching Initiative Teachers for the 21st Century.5 This document mentions specialist teaching skills only in relation to teaching Indigenous students, students in rural or remote locations, and students in urban disadvantaged schools.

In March 2002, the NSW Legislative Standing Committee on Social Issues published Foundations for Learning, findings from their Inquiry into the Early Intervention into Learning Difficulties.6 The primary target group for this inquiry was “children who have or who are likely to experience learning problems but do not have a diagnosed physical or intellectual disability”. “Generally speaking, these children would be expected to achieve ‘age-appropriate outcomes’ if they receive appropriate early intervention”, with some children’s problems being mild and amenable to brief intervention, others requiring more intensive support.

That report went on to say that children with learning difficulties are clearly not an homogeneous group.

Their difficulties may be intrinsic, extrinsic or a combination of both factors. The inquiry also reported “considerable debate over the terminology used to describe this group of children”, and that, “DET (NSW Department

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of Education and Training) uses the term ‘significant learning difficulties’, while the term ‘dyslexia’ is also frequently used”. In August 2005, the Disability Standards for Education were enacted as subordinate legislation under the Commonwealth DDA 1992 - work on developing the Standards having been in progress since 1995. Development of the Education Standards was a collaborative effort involving the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, representatives from state and territory governments, and stakeholder groups within the disability and education and training sectors, including non-government education and training providers and universities.

The Education Standards clarify the obligations of education and training providers under the DDA, to ensure that students with disabilities are able to access and participate in education without experiencing discrimination. They set out a process to be followed to ensure that students with disability are provided with comparable opportunities and choices to realise their potential through participating in education and training on the same basis as students without a disability. The standards state that the effectiveness of the standards in achieving their objectives will be reviewed in 2010, including a consideration of whether any amendments are desirable.

In May 2008, the Commonwealth National Assessment Program (NAPLAN) commenced, with special provisions available in order for students with “special needs” to participate; many of whom would have significant learning difficulties. The 2008 NAPLAN School Manual stated: “Students should have access to special provisions which reflect the kind of support and assistance usually provided in the classroom in order for that student to demonstrate what they know and can do.”

The Manual also stated, “The results of the tests will provide important information to schools about what each student can do and will be used to support teaching and learning programs”. Therefore, to inform Commonwealth targeted funding to education, NAPLAN results were disaggregated by gender, Indigenous status, language background, geographic location, and socio-economic background. However, despite the requirement that all special provisions granted must be indicated on students’ test reporting documentation, there was no result reporting category for students identified with special needs requiring exam provisions. Therefore, there is no path from the NAPLAN results to targeted funding in support of students with any kind of disability.

A reason for this can be found in the Commonwealth Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Education Agreement, in which the Ministers agreed (page 3, Schedule D):

- “That it was not feasible to develop key performance measures in enterprise education or a definition encompassing all students with disabilities, that could be used for the purposes of nationally comparable reporting”.

- The Ministers also agreed to an “assessment and reporting cycle for the period 2006-2014”.

While the parties did agree to “provide support to students with additional needs”, they also agreed that it is the “role of the States and Territories to undertake responsibility for ensuring that all school-aged children are given the opportunity to enroll in a… supportive school that provides a quality education, including where students have particular needs”.

In December 2008, the NSW Legislature unanimously passed the Education Amendment Educational Support for Children with Significant Learning Difficulties (SLD) Act “to ensure that children with significant learning difficulties be included in the NSW Government’s Special Education Initiative for students with special needs”.

The Act defines identification of these children by saying that “a child has a significant learning difficulty if a qualified teacher or other qualified education professional is of the opinion that the child is not, regardless of the cause, performing in the basic educational areas of reading, writing, spelling and mathematics in accordance with the child’s peer age group and stage of learning”.

This definition is non-categorical and irrespective of potential ability. Therefore, very bright students who may also experience significant learning difficulties and who may be significantly underachieving, should receive support – thus seeking to maximise their potential, not just getting students over the line (e.g., by only providing additional support to those in the bottom band of NAPLAN). However, NSW decision-makers have yet to translate this legislation into policy and individual school P&Cs continue to fund – in one case $17,000 in February 2009 – the cost of support to students identified with additional literacy learning needs.

In August 2009, the Commonwealth-legislated Changes to the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act (1992), amending the DDA definition of disability to include a genetic predisposition to a disability – a primary causative factor of dyslexia. The amended definition also includes behaviour that is a symptom or manifestation of the disability – inviting consideration of known causative risk factors and typical characteristics of dyslexia for identification and early intervention.

Other changes broaden the scope of the DDA in that a person has grounds for discrimination if there are requirements with which the person with the disability is unable to comply, or which are likely to disadvantage the person with the disability. Also, the burden of proving the reasonableness of the requirement(s), in relation to the disability, lies with the person or jurisdiction imposing the requirement(s), not the applicant. The burden of proof

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regarding appropriate and sufficient service provision belongs to the education provider.

The Amended DDA and the Education Standards impose a duty to make reasonable adjustments for a person with disability such that the person would comply, or would be able to comply with the requirement if reasonable adjustments are made, and that the failure to make reasonable adjustments has, or is likely to have the effect of disadvantaging persons with the disability. Although providers can still claim making an adjustment, however reasonable, would impose an unjustifiable hardship.

The term “disadvantage” is not defined in the DDA. The Explanatory Memorandum states only that “in order for there to be discrimination, there must be a differential impact”. Two issues likely to arise are defining the group of people with the disability and the evidence required to establish that the group is disadvantaged by the requirement. In relation to dyslexia, these two issues have been addressed in the Helping people with dyslexia: national action agenda report.

It would seem though, that as all Australian children are legally required to attend school – compulsory school attendance which assumes literacy in order to access the curriculum and undertake assessment – that those with significant learning difficulties, including those who have not been identified and/or who have not had educational and/or learning environment adjustments provided in order to comply with requirements for participation, have grounds to claim discrimination.

With appropriate and sufficient intervention at all levels of education, those with significant learning difficulties caused by a learning disability such as dyslexia can expect to reach their academic and daily life potential, thus fulfilling the expectation that all children can learn to the best of their abilities if given the opportunity of participating in best practice evidence-based education – a position of equity.

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With appropriate and sufficient intervention at all levels of education, those with significant learning difficulties... can expect to reach their academic and daily life potential...
Hard data to support the effectiveness of QuickSmart Numeracy

Lorraine Graham and John Pegg, University of New England

The availability of structured intervention programs for students with learning difficulties in mathematics has always lagged significantly behind the availability of intervention programs for literacy. In the past decade, however, concern has grown in Australian schools and in the community about the high number of students who fail to develop adequate numeracy skills and who lose all motivation to persevere with middle school and high school mathematics (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008). The problem is not unique to Australia; similar concerns have been voiced in reports on educational standards in the US and in Britain. The general consensus from existing evidence is that some 5 per cent to 10 per cent of school-age children have significant difficulties mastering even the most basic number concepts and skills, and an even larger percentage of students finds mathematics a difficult and frustrating subject. Unfortunately, the achievement gap between these students’ numeracy skills and the expected standard for their age group widens over time. In many cases, their problems are still evident when they become adults, often placing limitations on employment options (House of Commons Public Accounts Committee: UK, 2009).

Current teaching methods that favour open-ended investigation, activity, and problem-solving in mathematics are not always effective in building and reinforcing basic number concepts and computational skills, particularly in students with learning difficulties. Similarly, in-class intervention strategies such as differentiating and grading learning activities according to students’ ability levels do not appear to overcome the learning problems these students experience. In fact, research has consistently found that, regardless of the underlying causes of learning problems, these students learn best through explicit and systematic instruction that provides ample opportunities for fundamental knowledge and skills to become firmly established through guided practice and corrective feedback (e.g., Ellis, 2005; Rowe, 2006).

With these issues in mind, in 2001 a team from the University of New England’s National Centre of Science, Information and Communication Technology and Mathematics Education for Rural and Regional Australia (SiMERR) designed an intervention program – titled QuickSmart – to reverse the trend of ongoing poor academic performance for students who have been struggling at school for several years and who are caught in a cycle of continued failure. QuickSmart targets students with learning difficulties in the middle school years and focuses on increasing their fluency (automaticity) in basic numeracy skills. The implementation of QuickSmart in Australia has been supported by research grants from the Australian Research Council, the Federal Government, project funds from SiMERR, and extensive cash and in-kind support from the Northern Territory and New South Wales. Since 2001 QuickSmart has been implemented on an increasingly expansive scale. In 2008/2009 the program extended to more schools in New South Wales and the Northern Territory and was introduced into South Australia, Victoria, and the Australian Capital Territory. To date, the total number of schools that have had involvement in the implementation of QuickSmart programs is 148.

QuickSmart is a teacher or teacher aide-directed program that operates during three 30-minute lessons per week over a period of 30 weeks. Students participate in the sessions in pairs and are taught in a withdrawal setting, not in the mainstream classroom. They are taught to develop effective strategy use and participate in targeted practice activities. QuickSmart students spend considerable lesson time becoming ‘quicker’ at recalling number facts and performing simple calculations, and ‘smarter’ in strategy use. Both structured and incidental strategy instruction are important features of numeracy lessons, with the aim of moving students away from relying on slow and error-prone strategies (especially count-by-one strategies) to the use of more sophisticated and efficient strategies and automatic recall. Focusing on various domains in numeracy (but primarily mental computation and problem-solving), the program enables teachers and teacher aides to plan instruction that meets individual students’ learning needs and also provides opportunities for them to self-monitor and to receive immediate, formative feedback.

The content of QuickSmart Numeracy covers (but it is not limited to) addition, subtraction, multiplication and division facts, and triple multiplication and addition tasks such as $7 + 4 + 3$ (where quick and effective mental strategies are encouraged, like recognising instantly that $7 + 3$ makes 10, and then add 4). The QuickSmart program emphasises the usefulness and relevance of facts and strategies to regular classroom activities.

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The learning and teaching strategies employed in QuickSmart sessions are drawn directly from research evidence identifying effective methods for students with learning difficulties (e.g., Bryant et al., 2008; Gersten, Jordan & Flojo, 2005). These include explicit strategy instruction, modelling, discussion, questioning, feedback, guided and independent practice, and frequent reviews. Each lesson involves brief revision of work covered in the previous session, a number of guided practice activities featuring overt self-talk, discussion and practice of memory and retrieval strategies, and games and worksheet activities followed by timed and independent practice activities.

Ongoing, formative assessment is an integral part of the QuickSmart intervention program and ensures that the learning program is tailored to extend the existing knowledge and skills of individual learners. Most lessons conclude with an assessment using the computer-based Cognitive Aptitude Assessment System (CAAS) to provide the student and the instructor with information about the accuracy and speed of recall of basic facts. This software was developed at the Laboratory for the Assessment and Training of Academic Skills (LATAS) at the University of Massachusetts (Royer & Tronsky, 1998).

A professional training and support component is an essential component of QuickSmart for those involved in delivering the program in schools. The program is focused on supporting teachers to understand and provide:

- effective instruction that maximises student on-task time and opportunities for meaningful feedback;
- learning scaffolds to ensure students experience improvement and success;
- deliberate practice that is integral to every lesson, allows for success and is focused on providing targeted feedback to improve learning;
- guided and independent timed practice activities;
- strategy instruction and concept development;
- confidence in their students by encouraging a ‘can do’ attitude;
- appropriate teacher and peer modeling; and
- motivational academic activities that develop fluent performance.

Over the period 2001 to 2008 a great deal of valuable empirical evidence has been gathered from schools to allow evaluation of the value and applicability of the QuickSmart Numeracy program (SiMERR, 2009). The longitudinal accumulation of such evidence from multiple jurisdictions across a range of geographic and socio-economic contexts is, we believe, a more powerful evaluation procedure than any single controlled experimental study for establishing the veracity, usefulness, effectiveness and sustainability of the program. The QuickSmart project uses a quasi-experimental research design involving collecting and analysing pre-test and post-test data from two groups of students: (i) the ‘QuickSmart Students’, who participate in the numeracy intervention programs; and (ii) ‘Comparison Students’ who do not participate in the intervention programs. These comparison students are average achievers in mainstream mathematics, are the same age as the QuickSmart students, and are drawn from the same schools. They complete the selected CAAS sub-tests in numeracy at the beginning and the end of the intervention period and also participate in the standardised testing sessions. Pre-test and post-test data are collected by school-based QuickSmart coordinators for both sets of students using results from the CAAS tests and the independent statewide or the standardised achievement test (Progressive Achievement Test Mathematics (PATM), ACER, 2005). These data help to quantify ways that QuickSmart narrows the achievement gap for low-achieving students, and serves to isolate any effects attributable to the instructional program.

Interviews and surveys of students, parents, teachers, and principals involved in QuickSmart have also yielded important qualitative data on the program’s effectiveness. Using QuickSmart data from 2001 to 2008, effect sizes (ES) were calculated for each main region or Territory where QuickSmart has been implemented. Effect sizes were used here to quantify the effectiveness of interventions relative to comparison groups. Discussion of effect sizes enables researchers to move beyond the simplistic, ‘Does it work or not?’ to the more useful, ‘How well does it work in a range of contexts?’ In educational research it is generally accepted that an insignificant effect size is around 0.1, an average effect size is around 0.3, important effect sizes begin above 0.4, and significantly important effect sizes occur above 0.6.

The official report evaluating QuickSmart (SiMERR, 2009) contains effect size data tables for many separate regions participating in the program and for different years of involvement. The scope and length of this brief paper do not allow for reproduction of all these tables, so for convenience effect size results are summarised here.

In this longitudinal study, the effect sizes obtained across schools and jurisdictions are remarkably consistent, ranging from 0.49 to 0.80, with greater effects evident for the QuickSmart students over the comparison group’s performance in all cases. Across the board, the effect sizes based on the scores of the QuickSmart students are well above the expected yearly average growth of around 0.3. For example:

- In the Northern Territory during 2006, 2007, and 2008 the effect size growth of many hundreds of QuickSmart students based on state-wide tests was 0.68, 0.60 and 0.78, respectively compared to a considerably lower effect size of approximately 0.3 or less calculated for the average-performing comparison cohorts. It is particularly pleasing to note that in 2008 data from the Indigenous students with
mathematics learning difficulties in the Northern Territory cohort revealed an effect size of 0.76.

• Students from the eight schools which participated in QuickSmart in the NSW North Coast Region in 2007 recorded an effect size of 0.75 on the ACER PAT tests. In contrast, the comparison cohort’s effect size was calculated to be 0.19. The improvement of the QuickSmart students represents approximately three years’ growth over the course of a single year. This result improved further in 2008 with an effect size of 0.80 calculated for the QuickSmart sample of 238 low-achieving students.

• An analysis by an independent statistician of the large data-sets of ACER PATM scores from several hundred NSW students found that the effect sizes for QuickSmart students ranged from 0.59 to 0.69, with the latter figure representing those students who completed the full thirty weeks of instruction.

Finally, the qualitative data obtained from interviews and surveys involving students, parents, teachers, and principals have indicated great support and enthusiasm for QuickSmart. Again the official report (SiMERR, 2009) contains many examples gleaned from the comments from administrators and from over 2,000 students and many hundreds of teachers and parents. Here we present just two sample comments, one from a student, and one from an administrator.

A female student’s comment:
I know my times tables better than I did. I’ve improved my speed by finding short ways of doing the number facts. And I know about denominators and numerators. And how to change things into a decimal or a percentage and how to put things in the right groups. (2003, A student in Armidale, NSW).

An administrator’s comment:
My experiences in viewing QuickSmart in action in the schools in New England are all positive. I have found many students, who were previously disengaged with mathematical activities, totally engaged in the activities and process that form a major part of the intervention… Independent research in the New England region indicated that students, including Aboriginal students, make quick gains in their ability and confidence to use mathematics. (A/General Manager, Learning and Development, NSW DET)

It can be concluded from the quantitative and qualitative data collected over a period of eight years from a variety of settings that QuickSmart achieves its aim of ‘narrowing the gap’ in mathematics achievement for low-achieving middle-school students.

It should be noted that the QuickSmart intervention program also targets literacy skills, but data are still being processed on this aspect of the program. The official report (SiMERR, 2009) contains some provisional findings on literacy. Details of both numeracy and literacy programs can be found online at: www.une.edu.au/simerr/QuickSmart/pages/index.php.

References


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Nine years of early intervention research: the effectiveness of the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) in Australia

Suzanne Dean and Cynthia Leung, Victoria University

In 2009, the Federal Government of Australia commenced investment of $32.5 million in the nationwide establishment of the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY). HIPPY is an internationally recognised early educational service program targeting relatively disadvantaged families of preschoolers. It operates on widely acknowledged principles relating to the prevention of learning difficulties through enrichment of the experience of children at risk of such difficulties due to environmental circumstances (Halpern, 2000; McLoyd, 1999). First introduced to communities in Australia in 1998, it is managed by HIPPY Australia within the Melbourne-based Brotherhood of St Laurence, which holds the licence to operate HIPPY in Australia. As a result of advocacy by the Brotherhood of St Laurence regarding the potential benefits of this program, the Australian Government, with a strong commitment to early childhood, will establish HIPPY in 50 communities in partnership with the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Up to 3,000 participating families will be involved. This advocacy was successful against the background of a concerted program of process and outcome research, conducted by Victoria University, which formed a vital part of HIPPY for the nine years following its introduction to Australia. This paper reviews the research program and its findings, beginning with a brief description of HIPPY in its international context.

HIPPY and its implementation around the world

Known in most countries as the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters, HIPPY is an intensive, structured program designed to enhance the learning readiness of preschool children (between three and five years of age) within educationally disadvantaged communities, often migrant groups. It was created and pioneered in Israel in the 1960s, at the National Council of Jewish Women Research Institute for Innovation in Education, within the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, by Lombard (1994) and colleagues. HIPPY aims to assist parents with lower levels of education and income to facilitate capacities for learning and associated confidence in their young children.

The program has been unique among structured, home-based early childhood educational programs in using parenting to enhance the learning environment of the child. Firmly grounded in the family, it provides individual and group education to parents by paraprofessional Home Tutors recruited from the local community. Under the guidance of a professional program coordinator, tutors employ role playing techniques with parents to prepare them to interact with their preschool children in brief, clearly planned activity sessions set for each school day, over a period of two or three years. The curriculum involves directions for incremental daily learning activities supported by materials and books promoting general conceptual, verbal, visual and coordination skills. Every fortnight, the Home Tutor visits the parent in the family home, and on alternate weeks the parent joins a parent group meeting for the week’s instruction. These features of the program are further detailed in the HIPPY Manual (HIPPY Australia, 1999). The program operates within a community project framework, in that local communities are invited to consider the potential usefulness of the program in the first place, and, during implementation, ongoing interaction between HIPPY and other local service providers of the program is facilitated. Between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s, through the efforts of HIPPY International, based at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, HIPPY had been implemented in some 10 countries outside Israel, namely the United States, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Germany, South Africa, Mexico, Chile, Turkey, Canada and Australia. Diverse outcome research studies had been conducted, generally limited by the methodological problems that challenge program evaluation (Adler, 1995). Nevertheless, the small body of research reported across several cultural settings had found that HIPPY had often not only enhanced children’s self esteem and capacity to benefit from school, but had also stimulated parents’ self-confidence in educational involvement (for an overview of these studies see Westheimer, 2004). Its general success was largely attributed to its being family and community based, and to its creative and careful use of developmentally appropriate activities.
The Victoria University research plan for Australia: aims and methods

At the point of HIPPY’s introduction to Australia, an integrated series of independent research studies was planned by a team in the Wellness Promotion Unit of the then School of Psychology of Victoria University. From the start it was recognised that the program would need to operate differently in Australia, where cultural diversity within communities is often greater than in many other countries, and where children enter school at age five instead of age six. It was planned to introduce the program in its two-year format, embracing ages four and five, the preschool year and the first year of school.

It was considered vital that research be conducted with the principal aims of establishing (a) whether HIPPY could be successfully adapted to Australian conditions, (b) whether it could achieve here the outcome goals of the program, and (c) what processes in the program appear critical. Rigorous research was the objective, solving as many of the methodological problems exposed by previous HIPPY research as possible. One way of doing this was by gathering a wide range of data from all relevant sources. Accordingly, a series of projects were planned, focusing on complementary process and outcome research, and using combinations of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Observations, in-depth interviews, and formal psychological and educational assessment techniques would all be used, and the experience of parents, children and all HIPPY staff would be studied. Quasi-experimental designs, employing comparison groups, or other methods of tracking quantitative changes, would be implemented as appropriate and possible.

A series of 10 studies was carried out over a period of nine years, with funding from both Victoria University and the Australian Research Council in collaboration with two of the HIPPY service delivery agencies, namely the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Glastonbury Child and Family Services. The research program was led by Suzanne Dean, Cynthia Leung and Anthoula Kapsalakis, and conducted by postgraduate and Honours students in the context of research theses. Each study built upon the last, each highlighting a different aspect of HIPPY, as outlined below.

Benefits for inner city migrant and refugee children and families

Research began with a needs study in the inner Melbourne district of Fitzroy, where the Brotherhood of St Laurence proposed to introduce HIPPY (Dean, Leung, Gilley, & Grady, 2004). Documentation of the needs of local preschoolers, as perceived by early childhood and primary school staff in the district, clearly indicated the likely value of the program for local, newly arrived migrant and refugee families with limited education and other social disadvantages. Next followed a systematic qualitative evaluation of the ongoing process of the initial implementation of the program (1998-1999), carried out by the Doctor of Psychology candidate Jacqueline Grady (2002). This research demonstrated that, according to parent and HIPPY staff views, HIPPY could be adapted and delivered successfully in a typical Australian immigrant community, in which families from a wide range of cultures must be catered for simultaneously. Sensitivity to cultural expectations of participating communities was found to be critical, implying a need to build HIPPY’s place within any given community for optimal effect. Factors perceived as facilitating this complex process included the structure of the program itself, appropriate resourcing of the program, the positivity of staff-parent relationships, and liaison with agencies delivering HIPPY in New Zealand. Parents and HIPPY staff overwhelmingly conveyed an experience of great benefit to both parents and Home Tutors, in addition to children’s learning and readiness for school. Parents also reported deepening of parent-child attachment, felt by parents to be at the heart of HIPPY activities.

Outcome evaluation, entailing a carefully matched non-HIPPY comparison group, of the second implementation of HIPPY by the Brotherhood (1999-2000) was then conducted with a culturally and linguistically diverse community of families in the same inner city environment as before. This quasi-experimental study was conducted by PhD candidate Tim Gilley (2002). Both qualitative reports of effects and direct quantitative measures of learning readiness, including the ‘Who Am I?’ technique (De Lemos & Doig, 1999), indicated favourable outcomes of HIPPY involvement. Also used was an Israeli measure of teachers’ assessments

HIPPY is an internationally recognised early educational service program targeting disadvantaged families of preschoolers.

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of children’s learning readiness, the ‘Gumpel Learning Readiness Scale’ (Gumpel, 1999), which had been validated in Melbourne in 1998 by Honours student Rima Moussa (2000), as part of the Victoria University research plan. Gilley found significant group effects for children in actual reading and math performance, in overall adjustment to school, and in academic self-esteem. Benefits were demonstrated for children experiencing only one year in the program, but were far greater for two year involvement. Parents again reported enhanced parent-child communication and closeness, an increased sense of their own pride in their children’s development, greater engagement with their children’s schooling, and increased interest in their own development, particularly among those parents employed as Home Tutors in HIPPY. Some children clearly benefited more than others, and qualitative process evaluation revealed one highly relevant factor to be that the greater the degree of parental commitment to the program, the better the learning readiness outcomes for children.

These two evaluation studies demonstrated that HIPPY can be an effective early educational intervention in an Australian immigrant and refugee context. They provided to HIPPY management feedback on an ongoing basis about the experience of families, especially their desire for more Australian-based materials. They also raised a myriad of useful questions for further research. Crucial examples of the latter, which have implications for research internationally, concerned the usefulness of HIPPY to disadvantaged families in other kinds of Australian communities, what range of factors might interact to both enhance and limit benefits for the parents, the child and the family, exactly how children’s educational and social competency may be extended by the program, and the potential usefulness of some form of service follow-up contact with HIPPY children and families. Some of these key questions were then addressed within the next phase of research, conducted in the Victorian regional centre of Geelong.

Value to children and families in regional Australia
Glastonbury Child and Family Services introduced HIPPY to Geelong in 2000, with a community of disadvantaged families and children typical of those in many areas in Australia. These were Anglo-Celtic families who had experienced considerable educational, social and economic disadvantage over several generations. Many of the participating children in the Glastonbury program experience, in addition, developmental difficulties. Victoria University continued with its research program to determine whether or not the program can deliver to this different population of children and families the early intervention benefits observed elsewhere. Unique aspects of this research were a new focus on the social as well as the intellectual development of the child, and the lived experience of children as well as of parents. Again, ongoing feedback was provided to the service provision agency and to HIPPY Australia, concerning the findings as they emerged. Again, emphasis was placed by families on the need for greater Australian content in the program.

Two studies, of the 2001 and 2002 HIPPY intakes in Geelong, evaluated the effect of HIPPY on parental attitudes, values and practices, on family relationships, and on children’s social and learning readiness development. These projects were conducted by Celia Godfrey (2007), Doctor of Psychology candidate, and by Jennifer Green (2007), PhD candidate. In both of these studies, parents, HIPPY staff and the children themselves provided research information in three waves – near the beginning of the program, during its second year, and eight months after its conclusion. The first study included tracking of the progress of a large proportion of children with developmental delay. This study was largely qualitative in nature, but did encompass quantitative measures of children’s developmental functioning. The second study, of the 2002-2003 intake, was quasi-experimental, contrasting direct measures of children’s progress in learning readiness with those of a more socio-economically advantaged comparison group, and also looked at effects on the parent-child relationship. Both studies not only examined HIPPY outcomes from the perspectives of all participants, but also the experience of the process of the program for parents, tutoring staff and administrative staff.

This research found the program to be beneficial for the children involved in terms of increased enjoyment and self-esteem in learning, and confidence in the academic learning situation itself. In the 2001-2002 group, Godfrey’s (2007) results revealed significant enhancement in direct measures of socio-emotional development and concrete early school skills, and the group of children were also found to be keeping to an upward developmental trajectory in other areas of cognitive development. Highest scores emerged while children were actually involved in the HIPPY program. A highly important finding was that the children experiencing developmental delay in this cohort demonstrated the same pattern of benefit as did the overall sample. Another very valuable finding, relevant to how HIPPY actually works, was that the skill and dedication of Home Tutors was evaluated by the Glastonbury management to be a pivotal factor in the success of this particular implementation, underlining yet again the centrality of interpersonal relationships in this early childhood program.

Green’s (2007) study of the 2002-2003 intake, involving the comparison group, found significantly enhanced social development in HIPPY children having been sustained, and having actually escalated after the conclusion of the program. Similar though less striking trends were found in academic development, when the achievements of the group of HIPPY children were compared on these dimensions with those of the group of more advantaged peers.

Both of the above studies, like the
earlier research in the inner-city culturally and linguistically diverse communities, revealed solid benefits for parent-child relationships, and for parents and families as well, on many levels. For example, parents and HIPPY staff often reported HIPPY to be a focus of shared enjoyment in the family, and to have facilitated parental understanding of child development and ability to communicate meaningfully with the child's school. A point of difficulty noted in the process evaluation conducted by both studies was the inability of a large proportion of parents to participate in the group meeting component of the program. Staff and parents had differing views of this phenomenon, but the effect was to increase pressure on Home Tutors, who still felt obliged to deliver the program weekly to all families. These studies made it clearer than ever that more detailed record-keeping is required for research to progress further, and for process issues such as the role of group meetings and mode of delivery to the child in the home to be fully explored.

Four shorter-term Psychology Honours research projects, complementing the broader evaluation projects, were also conducted in Geelong. The first of these finely focused qualitative studies explored the parent's experience of HIPPY (Kate McDonald, 2004), while the second explored the child's experience (Lyndsey Nolan, 2005). In the cross-sectional investigation of parent views, all parents were found to appreciate HIPPY as a flexible, adaptable, supportive and enjoyable program, which they clearly perceived as improving their children's learning readiness, in the context of improved parent-child bonding and communication. Expanded insight into child development was accompanied by pride in the children's achievements. Striking also were frequent reports of HIPPY facilitating general parenting skills and parent abilities in succeeding as the child's first "teacher", and of the process of the program reducing social isolation experienced by parents. This study of parents brought out very strongly how differences in the general social connectedness of parents influenced their experience of the program, with less connected parents deriving greater benefits. In the study of children's experience, children's enjoyment of HIPPY was found to be closely linked with their perceptions of the parent's enjoyment of and commitment to the program. To extend the potential reach of HIPPY research, the third Honours study (Megan Doutch, 2007) has further developed the investigation of children's experience of the program, aiming to establish a set of assessment techniques that may be helpful in tapping children's views of HIPPY at several levels.

The feasibility of follow-up research
From an outcome perspective, the fourth Honours project (Pinar Yurdakul, 2008), the final study in the entire series, has particularly useful. It comprised an investigation of the feasibility of follow-up research in relation to HIPPY in Australia. It succeeded in gathering data from 11 of the 18 families completing the program in Geelong in 2003, allowing comparison of outcome data collected with children one year subsequent to HIPPY completion (by Green, in 2004) with data collected after a further two years. The results demonstrated that learning readiness remained within normal limits, as predicted, but that socio-emotional development had actually continued to escalate. Equally importantly, this study showed that meaningful follow-up research with HIPPY groups in such a very disadvantaged community can be managed.

Conclusions and the potential future of HIPPY research in Australia
In terms of its principal aims, the research program reviewed here has (a) established that HIPPY can be successfully adapted to Australian cultural conditions, both in culturally and linguistically diverse migrant and refugee communities, and in Anglo-Celtic communities with educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, (b) revealed that it can be generally effective here in achieving its outcome goals of enhancing the learning readiness of participating children, and (c) illuminated processes in HIPPY considered critical from the multiple perspectives of parent, child, Home Tutor and management experience.

Further, gains by HIPPY parents and families that have been noted in other countries were found, particularly in terms of parents' perceptions of themselves as empowered to actively facilitate their children's development, and in terms of parents' sense of themselves as experiencing enhanced development. The Australian research went beyond past studies overseas to demonstrate gains in the socio-emotional development of participating children, including the enhanced parent-child relationship and enhanced family attachment reported by so many parents. This research program has also thrown new light on the usefulness of

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HIPPY with developmentally delayed children. Most importantly, the research has shown that follow-up of gains can be investigated in Australia within a HIPPY population.

Victoria University has now passed on the HIPPY research baton to Monash University in partnership with the Brotherhood of St Laurence Policy and Research Centre, supported by the Australian Government initiative. The current, widespread extension of HIPPY around Australia will permit larger in-depth studies of HIPPY delivery across different states. Such scope is now much needed, to allow further exploration of such critical elements as HIPPY’s community and interpersonal relationship grounding, its materials and methods, the fortnightly meeting alternating with home visits, the need for more detailed record-keeping, and which children and families are likely to benefit most from involvement. Expansion of the research will create opportunities for increased collaboration with HIPPY research internationally. At a different level, such broader scale research would, by using process and outcome evaluation as a springboard, facilitate fundamental integrative research in the broader child development, early educational intervention and prevention of learning difficulties fields.

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Magic Glasses

Kevin Wheldall

When I was a teenager I was intrigued by advertisements in the popular press for magic glasses, also known as 'X-ray specs', that apparently allowed one to see straight through the outer clothing and glimpse buxom ladies in their underwear. I resisted the temptation to buy a pair but later on at university I did wear tinted spectacles in an effort to look cool in spite of being severely short-sighted. I quite literally saw the world through rose-coloured glasses – but then it was the late 60s … What I did not realise at that time was that they might also have cured my dyslexia, had I been unfortunate enough to have been dyslexic. It would be just too good to be true, would it not, if we could cure dyslexia with magic glasses? The answer, sadly, is yes: it is too good to be true. But that does not stop thousands of parents whose children are struggling to learn to read to pay out large sums for tinted lenses of doubtful utility. Nor does the lack of convincing evidence for effectiveness seem to restrain the enthusiastic advocacy for coloured glasses by those who service this market. Let's look at the facts.

First, it does not make conceptual sense to attempt to address a disability by supposedly alleviating problems in a modality unrelated to the known cause of the difficulty. You would not recommend a hearing aid for someone with a poor sense of smell. But as we know, and as the vast majority of reading scientists now believe, dyslexia, and reading disability more generally, almost always results from difficulties in processing language; specifically it appears to be a phonological processing deficit. Children who struggle to learn to read do so not because they cannot see the letters or words clearly but rather because they find difficulty in breaking words up into their component sounds. So why would coloured glasses make any difference?

Second, even if we were to accept that there might be a small number of apparently dyslexic children whose problems are visual in nature, is the proposed remedy a credible solution? The problem here is that the hypothesised disabling condition, known as the scotopic sensitivity syndrome or the Irlen syndrome, is so unreliable diagnostically that many experts in vision doubt its very existence. In other words, coloured lenses appear to be the cure for which there is no known disease.

Third, and hence unsurprisingly, the evidence for the efficacy of coloured lenses in helping to redress reading disability is tenuous at best, with some studies finding no effect and some others claiming significant effects. Unfortunately, the studies claiming to provide positive evidence for efficacy are seriously flawed methodologically and are not accepted by most reading scientists.

Finally, you don’t have to take my word for this but perhaps you might take seriously a joint policy statement on ‘Learning Disabilities, Dyslexia and Vision’ (revised 2009) from the American Academy of Pediatrics (Section on Ophthalmology, Council on Children with Disabilities), the American Academy of Ophthalmology, the American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus and the American Association of Certified Orthoptists. Their conclusion is unequivocal: “Currently, there is no adequate scientific evidence to support the view that subtle eye or visual problems cause learning disabilities. … Furthermore, the evidence does not support the concept that vision therapy or tinted lenses or filters are effective, directly or indirectly, in the treatment of learning disabilities.” That this form of therapy simply does not work is plain to see, with or without tinted glasses.

The evidence does not support the concept that vision therapy or tinted lenses or filters are effective, directly or indirectly, in the treatment of learning disabilities.

References


Professor Kevin Wheldall is the Director of the Macquarie University Special Education Centre and is also the Director of the MULTILIT Research Unit at Macquarie University. Email: kevin.wheldall@speced.sed.mq.edu.au

APRIL 2010 – BULLETIN
Introducing a new online testing facility: The Macquarie Online Test Interface (MOTIf)

Thushara Anandakumar, Anne Castles and Genevieve McArthur, Macquarie Centre for Cognitive Science

Members of LDA may be interested to learn about a new facility developed at the Macquarie Centre for Cognitive Science (MACCS) that allows online administration of tests such as the Castles and Coltheart reading test. The Macquarie Online Test Interface (MOTIf; www.motif.org.au) is a free online facility designed to automatically administer, score, and provide reports for cognitive tests developed by Macquarie researchers. The tests can be administered to one or more people, and the test results for each registered user are stored individually in a secure and private database. MOTIf currently has around 350 registered users.

With its innovative features, MOTIf offers a more extensive use of cognitive tests than is currently available through more conventional mediums. Foremost, because MOTIf automates the testing process, non-scientists – from novice research assistants to nurses and doctors – are able to administer and interpret the tests for students, patients and subjects with ease. This practical aspect of the facility saves on time, costs and resources, which are often invaluable in busy clinical and research settings.

MOTIf’s online accessibility also means that the tests can be administered anywhere in the world, including remote areas of Australia. This specific feature is particularly useful for collaborative projects that require concurrent data collection by international or interstate collaborators who are testing children across a range of locations. Moreover, because it is free, MOTIf is also available to any researcher, teacher, clinician, or professional who is an approved registered user in need of these cognitive tests for their research or practice. This is especially helpful for researchers and clinicians working in areas who have limited funding to support their work.

As a relatively new website (developed in early 2009), MOTIf currently includes four cognitive tests, only one of which is fully automated. This test, the Castles and Coltheart 2 (CC2), assesses two key processes that children need to acquire when learning to read: sounding-out ability and whole word recognition ability. Sounding-out ability involves converting printed letters into their corresponding sounds, and is best assessed by measuring a child’s accuracy in reading aloud nonwords (nonsense words), such as ‘gop’, since these cannot be read by any other means. Whole word recognition ability involves accessing stored knowledge about familiar written words, and is best assessed by measuring accuracy in reading aloud irregular words, such as ‘yacht’, since these cannot be read correctly via sounding-out rules. Regular words, like ‘cat’ can be read accurately either by sounding-out, or by whole word recognition, and so provide a measure of the combined functioning of the two processes.

The CC2 contains a set of items, 40 each of regular words, irregular words and nonwords, which are presented one at a time, in a mixed order, and with gradually increasing difficulty. The test also incorporates a stopping-rule for each item type, which makes administration of the test less time-consuming, and removes the stress on children who can only read a few items. The benefits of automated testing through MOTIf are clearly evident in this test, which would otherwise require a certain level of expertise in presenting the 120 words in their specific order and in keeping track of scores so that the stopping rule can be employed at the appropriate time for each word type.

The CC2 has been normed on over 1000 children aged from six years zero months to 11 years six months. Through MOTIf, the online version of the test automatically calculates a separate accuracy score for each item type and converts this into a standard score for the child’s age based on the normative data. This information is presented instantaneously in a secure results page.

The three other tests featured on MOTIf include tests of spelling sound-letter rules and everyday reading comprehension. While these tests do not yet have normative data, they may still serve quite useful research and clinical purposes. Furthermore, because of the high demand and demonstrated success of MOTIf so far, the website has received new funding which will be aimed at collecting more normative data and making a more complete range of tests available. For more information visit www.motif.org.au.

Thushara Anandakumar is a Research Assistant at the Macquarie Centre for Cognitive Science (MACCS) working on a large training study of children with reading difficulties.

Dr Genevieve McArthur is an ARC Senior Research Fellow at MACCS and investigates the effects of different types of training on developmental dyslexia and specific language impairment.

Professor Anne Castles is currently Director of MACCS and has been exploring different types of reading difficulties in children for over 20 years. She is a member of the LDA council.
Book Review

Teaching Tough Kids: simple and proven strategies for student success
Mark Le Messurier
Routledge, London, 2010
Cost: $75 + $10 postage
Reviewed by Margaret Cameron

Following his earlier successful publication of Cognitive Behavioural Training: a how-to guide for successful behaviour, Le Messurier has again produced a book of practical wisdom for those who work with challenging young people – including those whose learning difficulties, attentional disorders or other conditions are associated with behavioural issues. To quote from the Introduction: “This book is written to enrich the ways we think about the tough kids and fortify the work we do with them in our schools.” This is exactly what the rest of the book addresses.

Le Messurier writes in accessible, conversational style to suit a wide readership, but his ideas are firmly based in sound academic research, as well as the experience of himself and colleagues working with such ‘tough kids’. The theory is illustrated with numerous case study vignettes, representing a wide range of troubled and troubling behaviours – the surface manifestation of emotional and mental states where ‘executive function’ is poor, for many and complex reasons.

Le Messurier is committed to the belief that educators, himself included, “have the capacity to influence transformation within students”. More than wishful thinking, this belief is supported by research that identifies teachers as one of the most influential variables in student performance – more powerful than the influence of home, peers and the school as a whole. He encourages educators to engage in self-reflection, and provides some tools for doing this effectively, recognising that our own behaviours can be part of the problem or the solution to the challenging attitudes and behaviours of students.

There is a chapter devoted to explaining restorative approaches, co-authored with Bill Hansberry, a practitioner in this area across a number of schools. This provides an alternative process to the punitive cycle that often dominates behaviour management approaches in schools. Subsequent chapters focus on understanding the underlying factors and providing strategies to improve concentration, task completion, organisation and memory. He then addresses the really difficult area of oppositional styled behaviours – approaches to working out what underlies and triggers the behaviours, and designing effective plans for improvement. Another chapter explores the particular needs of students with Asperger’s Syndrome, and considerations for developing improved social and emotional connections that are essential for improving their behaviour.

A chapter on ‘mood lifters’ is a welcome reminder that lighter moments in the day can make all the difference to classroom functioning – of course with practical ideas to make this happen. Finally, and not surprisingly from such a relational author, is an explanation of the benefits of mentorship, and how such a program can be implemented. Teaching Tough Kids is an invaluable resource for teachers and others who work with young people whose behaviour challenges their patience and personal resources. It has the potential to empower both the teachers and their students with more productive, proactive ways of thinking and behaving that make real learning and more positive living possible.

Margaret Cameron is Senior Lecturer in Education, Tabor, Adelaide.

LDA Online Bookshop

Books can now be ordered online through LDA

Our catalogue includes books on dyslexia, research and theory, language and phonics, teaching diverse learners, writing and spelling, maths, and books for parents.

Visit our website at www.ldaaustralia.org to browse our catalogue and download our order form.

Orders and payments can be submitted as directed on the form.
Current members of the Consultants’ Policy Committee are Jan Roberts (Convenor), Joan Cooper, Rosemary Carter, Elaine McLeish (also Referral Officer), Anne Barton, Jane McClure, Anne Pringle and we are delighted now to have Olivia Connelly, whose refreshing, youthful enthusiasm is so welcome.

Ongoing registration of Consultants
Most Consultant members are keeping up relevant PD and recording points in the new format. We would appreciate in future the use of the 2010 FORM B for recording PD points, rather than the old ‘running record’ sheet, although members may like to use this as a basis for completing their summary of PD points on the new form. Some members have been contacted to supply further details regarding their PD activities.

Applications for Consultant registration
In response to our advertising campaign, we warmly welcome five new Consultants: Gill Relph, Cathy Brotherton, Julie Thomas, Virginia Kaspar and Jacinta McMahon. We desperately need Consultants in the outer suburbs so if you are thinking of relocating, please move that way! A few applicants have been contacted about doing some further study in the field of LD and some new Consultants are being allocated Consultant mentors to help them along. We have been able to recommend the Victorian SPELD course on teaching students with learning difficulties, conducted by Dr Daryl Greaves and Michelle Hutchison.

Weekend professional development
Two workshops have been organised for the first half of 2010 as part of our ongoing program of PD for our Victorian Consultant members. These PD sessions are particularly for LDA members but are also open to others. The workshops are:
Term 1: Acquired brain injury (February 27)
Term 2: Teaching maths to students with LD (May 2)
Term 3 and 4: still to be decided although we are looking at using SPELD facilities for a computer software session for one of these.

For details of the May workshop see page 2. Remember to book ahead. The booking form can be downloaded from the website at www.ldaustralia.org.

Jan Roberts
Convenor, Consultants Committee
Email: learningpathway@optusnet.com.au

From the summary of referrals over the period July to December 2009 (see table right) it can be seen that in 2009 enquiries about referrals were slightly up on the previous year. Referrals progressing to take up with one of our consultants are of course considerably less. In the three-year period 2007 to 2009 (inclusive) there were a total of 2176 enquiries, but only were 607 taken up (based on payments received from Consultants in that period). This is roughly a 28 per cent take-up rate.

Some of the main reasons for enquiries not resulting in a take-up are cost, no Consultants available in the area and schools offering extra assistance.

In relation to the cost factor, I often alert parents to the possibility of qualifying for the non-means-tested Carer Allowance from Centrelink. I contacted Centrelink recently to see if they provided information sessions about applying for Carer Allowance, as a possible Professional Development session for Consultants. Unfortunately such a service is not available, but they did send me a bunch of application and information forms which I will bring to the next Professional Development session at International House for anyone interested.

In relation to “no Consultants available in the area”, this is an ongoing problem. Our recent advertising for new Consultants has attracted some great new Consultants and we’ve also had some previous Consultants rejoining, however it hasn’t helped with the problem of meeting the demand in the growth areas on Melbourne’s fringes. In relation to “schools offering extra assistance”, this is probably a good outcome if the assistance is appropriate.

Hopefully all Victorian Consultant members will have sent in their Consultant membership renewals by now, including their Professional Development summaries. As a member of the Consultant Policy Committee, I am part of the group of seven consultants assessing the summaries and communicating with the few Consultants who need to provide more information. There is some leeway at the beginning of the year about referrals because it can take awhile for renewals of registration to be received and processed. By March I expect to be only referring to Consultants who have officially registered with the Referral Service.

Most Consultants are now receiving their Referral Confirmations from me via email and some are making their payments via internet banking, thus cutting down on a lot of paper and postage. Please let me know by email or phone when a referral is taken up so that I can send on the Referral Confirmation form to you.

Elaine McLeish
Referral Officer, Victoria
(03) 9482 1031
Email: ehmcleish@iinet.net.au
Summary of Referrals: July to December 2004 – 2009

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Source of Referrals, July 2008 to December 2009

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Referrals by Year Level, July 2008 to December 2009

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Membership Application Form 2010

Membership is for the period 1 January to 31 December 2010

Pro rata membership subscriptions are not available. The annual membership fee entitles members to four issues of the Bulletin and two issues of the Journal for the calendar year. Back issues are supplied to members joining during the year.

Name ____________________________________________________________________________

(Individual membership)

Title ____________________________________________________________________________

Organisation ___________________________________________________________________________

(Institutional membership)

Type of organisation ___________________________________________________________________________

(Indicate whether school, or if other institution, please describe nature of institution)

Name of contact person ___________________________________________________________________________

(Institutional membership)

Address _______________________________________________________________________________

Email ___________________________________________________________________________________

Tel ___________________________ Mobile ___________________________

Degree/Qualification ___________________________________________________________________________

(Individual membership)

Current Occupation/Area of Interest ___________________________________________________________________________

(Individual membership)

Membership Categories

☐ Member $93.50 ☐ Consultant Member $148.50 (subject to accreditation)

☐ Student Member $49.50 (student ID required) ☐ Institutional Member (includes schools) $165.00

☐ Please find my cheque attached for $________

Payments by EFT can be made to:
BSB: 063 238  Acc. No: 1000 1271  Account Name: Learning Difficulties Australia

When using EFT please include your name in the transfer information fields, and send completed application form to LDA by mail, fax or email, giving date and reference of EFT payment.

or

Charge my ☐ VISA ☐ Mastercard

Card No _______________ _______________ _______________ _______________ _______________

Expire _____ / _____ / _____

Name on Card ____________________________________________________________________________

Signature ____________________________________________________________________________ Date _____ / _____ / _____

☐ Please tick if a receipt is required