in Alliance

THE ALLIANCE OF GIRLS' SCHOOLS (AUSTRALASIA) LTD
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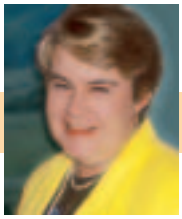
Both Ends of the Spectrum

Gifted, Talented & Special Needs Students

in this issue

From The Editor...

...lateral thinking is a necessity of teaching



"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." Ralph Waldo Emerson

The array of articles you are about to enjoy in this Volume is challenging to us all. We do indeed need to walk where others have not gone. *Both Ends of the Spectrum* covers gifted and talented students as well as those whose abilities do not fall within that which we deem the 'norm'. The fact that so many characters in history, who have added enormously to our lives, have fallen within this latter group demonstrates the care required of us as teachers to nurture all students. Lateral thinking is a requirement of life but a necessity of teaching.

We thank Clayfield College, Fairholme College, Kambala Church of England Girls' School, Lauriston Girls' School, Meriden School, MLC School, Perth College, PLC Perth, Samuel Marsden Collegiate School and The MacRobertson Girls High School for articles provided for this Volume and we particularly thank Mrs Jenny Deyzel for her informative special needs article *Students with learning disabilities.*

The excitement shared about competition at the Commonwealth Games in Manchester is magnificent to share.

Our affiliation with the National Coalition of Girls Schools in the USA is always highlighted by conferences and we are happy to read the reviews after five of our members attended recently.

Coming together in Sydney on 4 and 5 August, 2002 (see photo page 3), the Executive departed buzzing with excitement after the intensive sessions we shared delving into the Alliance and our future. Barbara Stone shares our intent with you. Again we need to note Ralph Waldo Emerson above.

This issue of *In Alliance* is intended as a springboard for further debate. We encourage you to enter the AGSA website (www.agsa.org.au) and take part in the on-line chat room and look forward to further outcomes from this challenging topic.

Nancy Hillier, Editor

From the Executive Director...

...inner happiness for all children

The case with most men is that they go out into life with one or another accidental characteristics of personality of which they say: 'Well, this is the way I am. I cannot do otherwise'. Then the world gets to work on them and thus the majority of men are ground into conformity ...there are a very few in each generation who in spite of all life's terrors cling with more and more inwardness to this 'I cannot do otherwise'. They are the geniuses.

Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (b.1813, d. 1855)

Reading through the articles sent for this Volume of *In Alliance* brings an awareness of two things in particular: that this subject is one dear to our hearts and that the core of *Both ends of the spectrum* is the inner happiness of all children. Kierkegaard's image of a person being 'ground into conformity' like so much 'play dough' is what this Volume is all about…it is just what we want to guard **against**.

Such words as 'strength', 'support', 'skill' and 'understanding' stand out from your articles. Albert Einstein said 'Everything that is really great and inspiring is created by the individual who can labour in freedom.' Such freedom allows students to thrive, whatever their talents.

In early August the Executive came together for 2 days in Sydney and, under Barbara Stone's leadership, delved into the past, present and future of the Alliance. Barbara's 'vision' article will give all members a sense of focus and intent for our future. There are exciting times ahead.

In June our affiliation with the National Coalition of Girls Schools (USA) came to the fore with five of our members attending the NCGS conference. An article and photo provide us with details.

Also in July, a busy month, were the Commonwealth Games, held in Manchester, UK. Some of our members had students who took part in this auspicious hub for competition and their reports follow the *Both ends of the spectrum* articles.

We look forward to receipt of articles for the next Volume, *A New Environment (boarding and exchange programs)*. Would you please forward all copy directly to me at esear.agsa@korowa.vic.edu.au as Nancy Hillier will be on leave from Annesley College in Term 4.

Edwina Sear, Executive Director

In Alliance Editorial Deadline 2002

Volume 25
A New Environment (boarding and exchange programs)
Thursday 10 October, 2002

Copy on the above topic for Volume 25 is welcome and should be submitted to Edwina Sear at The Alliance office or to esear.agsa@korowa.vic.edu.au

FROM THE PRESIDENT...

...meeting the challenges together

The journey from EGGS 1994 to AGSA 2002 has been a courageous and successful one. With more than 90 members in Australia and New Zealand it's tempting to sit back and enjoy this success.

The future challenges facing girls' schools, however, require a recharged sense of commitment, vision and direction from all. Girls' schools, especially in Australia and New Zealand, have long taken a leadership role in shaping educational practice to meet student needs. Since the leaders of the first girls' schools looked to give daughters the opportunity once only available to sons to prepare them to enter the universities and the professions, the task has been how to develop school environments that encourage and empower girls. By definition, girls' schools were required to develop "specialists" – rather than general practitioners – in the field of education.

Executive continuing from the day's session - Back L-R: *Carolyn Hauff, Edwina Sear, Nancy Hillier, Ann Mildenhall, Barbara Stone, Ros Otzen (partly obscured)* ***Front L-R:*** *Susan Just, Beth Blackwood, Lesley Boston (partly obscured).* ***Absent:*** *Suzanne McChesney*

Unfortunately, the current success enjoyed by girls' schools – their congregation at the head of whatever "league" tables governments devise, gives no reason for complacency. Until the opportunities for career success and happiness are just as great for women as they are for men, until there are as many "specialists" in boys' education in boys' schools as there are specialists in girls' education in girls' schools, there will be a job to be done by AGSA.

AGSA offers a unique and strategic opportunity for its members to become part of an essential specialist area in school education which operates at local, national and international level to support the development of its leaders, both adult and student.

At its recent face-to-face meeting the AGSA Executive looked at what it sees as the future for Australian and New Zealand schools. Because declining birth rates will bring increasing competition and economic pressure on schools, and the e-learning revolution will not only change teachers' roles but also the skills they will need, AGSA must develop itself so that it can support its member schools through these changes. It must become a 'clearing house' to drive best practice in the operation of girls' schools. Our intent is to be, "Meeting the Challenges Together".

By remaining steadfastly future focussed and world oriented, developing true collegiality in the promotion of leadership for women and girls' learning in girls' schools, we are confident that we can grow and improve our services. We are looking to develop within AGSA a culture which is outward looking, flexible, and continually monitoring performance to see where there are opportunities to improve and grow.

Each member of the Executive will run a "Think Tank" in their region to flesh out the future that we see and to share the strategy that has been developed prior to our annual conference next May.

Some changes in line with our new strategy will be quick and we encourage you to engage with them as fully as possible. Thank you to those who have already responded to help develop our website as a resource for the success stories of girls in girls schools by sharing details of Commonwealth Games performances by our students. Our plans are to build our website into an inviting and valuable resource for anyone arguing the case for girls' schools. Thank you, too, to those who are helping to build our membership with sister schools, many of whom face the challenges of arguing their unique value as organisations with little systematic, philosophical or collegial support.

Other changes will take a little longer. For instance, our publications are currently being reviewed to see if the wealth of stories and inspiration they contain can be developed into a suite of pamphlets in the style of the very effective, "Why a Girls' School?"

Further, it is hoped that next year's conference, 24 – 25 May, 2003 at Loreto Kirribilli, Sydney, will provide not just a fruitful opportunity for some targeted networking, but also a new resource on girls and their learning. And, as that irritating television advertisement says, "There is more!" The scope of this will be spelt out by the "Think Tanks" later this year.

"Meeting the Challenges Together" gives us the opportunity to demonstrate the power of purposeful collaboration, not just to make a difference in the life of girls' schools, but also to make a significant contribution to the understanding of the theory and practice of teaching and learning in general.

Barbara Stone, President,

NEW OFFER FOR AGSA MEMBERS

In Alliance offers you, the members of the Alliance of Girls Schools (Australasia) Ltd, the opportunity to use the Alliance website **www.agsa.org.au** to advertise positions you may have within your schools. To post an advertisement on the website simply send the details, set out in the manner you wish them to appear, to Edwina Sear at esear.agsa@korowa.vic.edu.au

There will be no extra charge for this service... this is a benefit of your membership.

www.agsa.org.au

Global Citizenship: Girls and Women as World Citizens...

...The National Coalition

... a review from Beth Blackwood, PLC, WA

The National Coalition of Girls' Schools Conference, held at Lincoln School, Providence, Rhode Island from June 26-28 had as its theme global citizenship.

The conference commenced with the presentation of NCGS International Woman of the Year Award to Tajwar Kakar, an Afghanistan educator for her courage, energy and conviction.

Tajwar was introduced to delegates by award-winning 60 Minutes producer George Crile, who shared with us Tajwar's efforts to educate Afghan children through both Russian and Taliban regimes.

During Taliban rule in Afghanistan, educating girls was a crime guaranteeing severe punishment. Tajwar demonstrated courage in standing firm and pressing every opportunity to build a future for children both within the war-torn nation and the refugee camps huddled at its borders. Her political actions eventually forced her to seek political asylum in Australia, but with the fall of the Taliban regime she returned to her native country where she is now Afghanistan's Deputy Minister of Education in Kabul. The task of rebuilding an educational system in Afghanistan cannot be understated with 90% of former schools and resources having been destroyed. The Coalition, its members and Ms. Kakar are taking the first, exploratory steps toward creating partnerships and collaborations in support of her work helping to rebuild Afghanistan.

"...nothing is more important than preparing our students for leadership - we need women of substance, independent yet encouraging of others."

Whatever tomorrow holds, it is likely the events of September 11 will still loom large in the minds of many people, young and old alike. Louise Richardson, Executive Dean of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies examined The Toll of Terrorism on Girls & Women. Her talk was a fascinating look at the research on terrorism, the hitherto profile of terrorists and ways in which those involved in the September 11 did not conform to the profiles. She also traced the history of women as terrorists. Globally women are actively involved in terrorism, comprising approximately 30% of terrorists, most being drawn in through relationships with men. The role of women as terrorists, however, is predicted to decrease as the more recent form of fundamentalist terrorism excludes women from their ranks on grounds of religion.

For the speaker the reality is that we will never be invulnerable to terrorism. War will not be an effective weapon against terrorism, but relentless pursuits, intelligence gathering, incentives to defect, and reinforcement of democratic rights are strategies that have previously assisted campaigns against terrorist attacks.

JoAnn Deak author of *How Girls Thrive* and *Girls will be Girls: Raising Courageous and Confident Daughters* is a consultant to schools on issues of brain development, gender equity and optimal learning environments for boys ad girls.

Neurological research indicates gender differences in the structure of the brain. For example, embedded in the brain is the amygdala. This centre for emotion seems to be more active in females than males, perhaps explaining why females are more likely to experience the negative emotions of fear, anxiety, depression and why women are 10 times more nervous than men to speak publicly!

Deak was suggesting that it is important to identify gender patterns at an early age and focus on developing growth in areas that need strengthening. eg. for girls generally in spatial awareness, and for boys in auditory discrimination. Genetic gifts will never match effort, Dr Deak said. Parents as well as teachers must find ways to take advantage of the qualities that make girls and boys unique.

The session *Author Presentations* provided an opportunity to meet four best-selling authors: JoAnn Deak (*Girls will be Girls*), Karen Stabiner (*All Girls: Single-Sex Education and Why It Matters*), Catherine Thimmesh (*Girls Think of Everything: Stories of Ingenious Inventions by Women* and *The Sky's the Limit: Stories of Discovery by Women and Girls*) and Rosalind Wiseman (*Queen Bees and Wanna Bees: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends and other Realities of Adolescence*).

Karen Stabiner in her quest for the best education for her daughter took a definitive look at two all-girls schools. Her conclusions were that single-sex schools are at the vanguard of what's going on in education today. They are reinventing the classroom and we ought to be looking at what they have to offer and borrowing their model and techniques for use in co-educational schools.

Initially Stabiner was concerned about what she perceived as arrogance in girls at all girls schools. However, her conclusion was that it was not arrogance she was seeing, but confidence. These girls had none of the baggage that comes with being a teenage girl in our society. They had a remarkable energy and a real willingness to try new things. They also felt free to stumble and look foolish and were willing to take risks. Another interesting piece of Stabiner's research revealed that for girls at co-ed schools, self-esteem was directly tied to popularity and appearance. At single-sex schools, it was linked to achievement. The hierarchy she observed in single sex schools was different from co-ed. The closest thing to social division that I saw was between girls who took their studies seriously and those who did not.

The winner of this year's US Woman of Achievement award Ruth Simmons, President of Brown University and former president of Smith College gave an inspirational address titled *College Women Today: World Leaders Tomorrow*. Dr. Simmons is one of a handful of Americans to be lauded by Newsweek as *People for the Future* for her commitment to women's issues, diversity and academic inquiry.

According to Dr Simmons nothing is more important than preparing our students for leadership - we need women of substance, independent yet encouraging of others. The reality at present, however, is that many leaders are not capable of making

of Girls' Schools Conference, Lincoln School, Providence, Rhode Island USA- June 26-28 2002

basic moral decisions and leading businessmen (e.g. Enron), despite being well educated, cannot discern the importance of integrity. She stressed the importance of staff understanding the context in which they teach - that they are preparing students to live full, ethical and meaningful lives. Too often the implicit is forgotten.

Dr Simmons contended that there is a tendency today to encourage students to avoid conflict rather than confront and negotiate issues. Students would be better served by being required to resolve conflicts and to be taught the skills of conflict resolution. We need to encourage a culture of leadership, one in which every individual takes responsibility for their role. Students do not learn overnight to be a leader nor to have courage at the point of need but rather through the act of practising responsibility and leadership every day.

The AGM of the National Coalition of Girls' Schools highlighted a number of directions for the organisation, including:

- creating a more effective website, to be completed by the beginning of new school year;
- seeking to contribute as policy makers/contributors to single sex education debate in the light of a bi-partisan amendment to President Bush's recent Education Bill that has made the option of single sex schools or classrooms available to public schools. While there is no *one size fits all* solution to education there is a growing consensus that the optimal learning environment for many is single sex. To further advance the debate the National Coalition of Girls' Schools is sponsoring seminars around the country on what makes single-sex education the best option. Authors Karen Stabiner and JoAnn Deak will lead the seminars.
- focusing energy on collaboration with researchers and thoughtful authors.

The 2002 Conference was inclusive of student representatives from the States, Canada and Australia. A Student Forum allowed us to hear students' voices on issues related to girls as global leaders and the role schools play in equipping young women for the challenges of leadership.

The commitment and collegiality of those attending the National Coalition Conference ensured a lively, engaging and worthwhile experience. Future NCGS Conferences are as follows:

June 25-27, 2003 Ashley Hall (Charleston, North Carolina)

June 23-25, 2004 Hamlin School (San Francisco, California)

June 22-24, 2005 Harpeth Hall (Nashville, Tennessee)

We acknowledge and thank Beth Blackwood, PLC, WA for this article

... a review from Margaret White, Kambala, NSW

The NCGS conference held at Providence Rhode Island, from June 28, was preceded by a pre-conference day for staff of member schools who were new to girls' schools. The program was an interesting one and attracted many participants who were indeed already most experienced educators within girls' schools.

Those present were introduced to the Executive Directors of the Coalition, Meg Moulton and Whitney Ransome, who spoke about the role of the organization and gave an appreciation of the work done to promote our innovative and exciting educational institutions.

Gillian Moore, Whitney Ransome, Denise Thomas, Meg Milne-Moulton, Margaret White, Beth Blackwood at the NCGS Conference.

Rosalind Wiseman, author of *Queen Bees and Wannabees* explained her *Empower Program* and its emergence from her personal experiences within teaching and supplemented by research.

This background provided rich material from which she drew fascinating portraits – adolescent girls constrained far more rigidly by their own constantly reinforced rules of behaviour and expectations than are any we could impose. She reminded her audience that those in the inner circle of popularity could have pressures placed on them at least as great as those aspiring to that position. Her view that the parents with which we work are equally subject to these dynamics, certainly appeared to ring true with the audience.

JoAnn Deak spoke with passion about her conclusions, based on the most recent research, that the personality of the teacher and the size of the class have the most lasting impact on educational outcomes. She also spoke of the female differentiated brain of 80% of the girls within our schools, being receptive to collaboration and community-based and run organizations. She explained that, therefore, authoritarian approaches often meet with little success in our schools.

The participants came from a wide range of school types and sizes. Some represented new schools and many came from the most prestigious and long established private girls schools in North America.

The interaction between colleagues was stimulating as were the presentations and this day certainly set the scene for an excellent conference.

We acknowledge and thank Margaret White, Kambala, NSW for this article.

PROVIDING ENRICHMENT AND EXTENSION FOR STUDENTS...

...reaching full potential

The appointment of a Coordinator of Enrichment in 2001 at Fairholme College was a pivotal step in acknowledging the College's commitment to catering for the needs of all students, particularly high ability learners. Focus has been on ensuring that the needs of all students are provided for through involvement in enrichment activities for all, and extension activities for our high ability learners. This supports the College's mission of ensuring that educational experiences continue to be of high quality and in line with each student's ability, constantly encouraging them to 'reach' for their potential and to remain challenged in their learning.

Initially, particular attention was paid to Years 5 through 9, these having been targeted as areas of greatest need by the College. Such a focus also supported the 'Transition to Secondary' program also implemented in 2001. However, as time has passed we have not been able to ignore student need in other year levels and as a result the focus is becoming wider as one would expect. Ultimately it is our long-term goal to have the needs of gifted and talented students catered for through differentiated curriculum becoming an integral and imbedded component of every mixed ability classroom throughout the College. As Tannenbaum (1983) points out we aim to have our programs viewed as 'part and parcel' of the curricula offerings of a school. This is supported by Borland (1989) who states that such programs are not add-ons, options or frills. They represent an acknowledgement...that there are gifted students in the system, that these students have special educational needs, and that educators have an obligation to address these needs within the curriculum." (pp 44-45).

"...Fairholme College is aware of the frightening consequences which can occur if gifted learners are not catered for."

In justifying why the existing core curriculum is not appropriate for gifted learners Fairholme College is aware of the frightening consequences which can occur if gifted learners are not catered for. Research has shown that whilst some gifted students do achieve a degree of success on their own, it is highly unlikely that these children will reach their full potential without the specialised educational requirements which are designed and implemented to enhance special abilities and talents. (Sisk, 1988; Silverman, 1989)

The development of all-encompassing Enrichment and Extension programs is still in its early stages and will continue to evolve, however a number of initiatives and programs have been developed and implemented. A brief overview of these follows.

- Fairholme College Junior Mathematics Program – All students in Years 8 and 9 are pre-tested on the focus questions of each concept. This provides students with the opportunity to 'test out' of a particular concept they have already mastered. Students also displaying characteristics of giftedness in Mathematics have also been formally identified. This allows for curriculum compaction and the implementation of relevant extension where necessary.
- Fairholme Primary Mathematics Extension Program – In various year levels gifted students have been identified and are pre-tested on concepts being covered in class. Those who demonstrate mastery work on a compacted core curriculum which is complemented with extension activities in a learning centre format.
- Incorporation of *Murder under the Microscope* an on-line eco-crime exercise as a part of the Year 5 'Mystery' unit.
- Years 6 and 7 weekly after-school Mathematics Enrichment Group – open to all students in these year levels who have ability, or who are interested in Mathematics. A strong focus of this program has been to focus on encouraging girls to become risk takers and to develop more confidence in their Mathematical ability.
- Implementation of the JASON Project in Years 7 and 8. This is a challenging, self-differentiating Science based program. It allows students to enter a dynamic virtual learning community and embark upon an interdisciplinary multi media research expedition that is mirrored with investigations within their own classroom.
- A focus on the Secondary Junior English and Humanities Program to look at rich concepts as integration vehicles eg. 'Conflict' as a focus of the Year 9 Novel Study Unit, and the commencement of the writing of differentiated units in both departments implementing strategies from the models of Maker (1982) and Bloom (1956) in the development of questions and tasks.
- Incorporation of differentiated junior work programs in the Science Department utilising Problem Based Learning based on Dr. Joyce Van-Tassel Baska's (1988) model, Independent Research Tasks involving strategies advocated by Maker (1982). To compliment these modifications higher level independent research tasks have been developed for students who may work on an accelerated content program in certain units.
- Development of curriculum differentiation in all Primary year levels designing units of work incorporating Bloom (1956), Maker (1982) and Williams.
- Implementation of 'Resident Experts' program for gifted students in Year 1.
- Independent Study Projects (individual students extension)
- Numerous lunchtime and after school 'Clubs' in Fairholme Primary. These include chess club, Supa club, various choirs, computing club etc.
- Weekend Art Enrichment Workshops for students in Years 4 –10.
- Various external state, national, and international competitions eg. Tournament of Minds, University of New South Wales, Westpac Mathematics, Pacific Coal, Australian Primary Schools Mathematical Olympiad, International Young Physicists Tournament, Australian Science Olympiads etc.
- Mentoring activities between the Secondary and Primary departments.
- Year Level Cross Curricular Enrichment Days for Years 8 ('Going to Extremes', Doll House Design) and Year 9 ('Wok On')
- Fairholme Primary Art and Design/Technology Enrichment days with a neighboring boys school each term for students in Years 4 - 7.
- Coordination of and participation in a Year 7 Combined Schools Day of Excellence with two other local independent schools. Participation

in the Association of Independent Schools Queensland Days of Excellence program.

- Years 8 and 9 annual Enrichment Camp to Slade School, Warwick
- Fairholme Primary Science Fair
- Development and Implementation of a weekly rotational Enrichment Program for Years 1-3 focussing on design and technology, problem solving and creative thinking
- Independent Science Investigations Years 4-7 (CREST green orange and blue levels) allowing students to progress at their own rates and according to their own interests.

Arts Department

- Individual Tuition available for all Band & Orchestral instruments as well as voice & piano
- Ensembles including - Primary String Orchestra, Junior Concert Band,
- Senior Concert Band, Stage Band, Symphony Orchestra, Chamber String Orchestra, String Quartets, Saxophone Quartet,
- Primary, Secondary and Chamber Choir
- Year 11 Excellence in Music
- Year 12 Extension Music
- Full school Arts Festival covering music, drama, dance and art.
- Individual and group performance
- Organisation of combined schools festival events in choral, string and band
- Participation in competition for groups and individuals
- External extension through activities such a State Honours Ensemble
- Program through Qld Conservatorium

The need for intensive professional development and support for all academic staff has been vital in the successful implementation of all Enrichment and Extension programs at Fairholme College. This coupled with the positive attitudes of staff members and willingness to embrace new strategies and ideas has been instrumental in the success of all programs. The continual professional development for all academic staff is vital to maintain interest, commitment and knowledge.

To date the staff participate in professional development in the following areas.

- Definitions of Giftedness and Talent
- Characteristics of gifted students
- Identification of gifted students
- Curriculum Differentiation Models with particular focus on Bloom (1956), Maker (1982), and Kaplan
- The JASON Project
- Pre-testing
- Creativity
- Curriculum compacting and learning contracts
- Thinking Skills (Primary)
- Independent Projects (Some Departments)

This Professional Development has been conducted by the College's Coordinator of Enrichment and also visiting experts in the field.

The development and implementation of Enrichment and Extension Programs at Fairholme College will continue to grow and be enhanced as we aim to ensure all of our students are given the greatest opportunity to reach their potential and be engaged in stimulating, motivating, and challenging experiences directly linked to their individual needs.

We acknowledge and thank Fairholme College for this article.

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Leadership: One of Five Specific Areas of Giftedness...

...realising contribution to self and society

Some important reasons why schools have a responsibility to address the learning needs of their gifted students are acknowledged in the statement by the Victorian Department of Education. 'School provision for the full range of needs of gifted students will benefit the individual student, the broader school community and, ultimately, the society of the future.' (Bright Futures – DOE 1996) This can certainly be the case when providing for students with leadership ability. In the 1970s the United States Office of Education recognised leadership ability as one of five specific areas of giftedness and that specific educational provision is required to enable students to achieve their potential and 'realise their contribution to self and society.' With their ability to learn easily at a sophisticated level, their intellectual curiosity and reasoning powers, their initiative and originality and creative thinking skills, gifted students have obvious potential to become our future leaders but leadership ability also requires a whole range of interpersonal understandings and skills best developed through practice and experience within leadership roles. Programs that challenge gifted young people to take on leadership roles, whilst providing a supportive framework, allow for the experiential learning that most effectively develops their leadership ability and sense of the civic responsibility that leadership entails.

Participants in Youth Leaders International and Youth in Philanthropy - student leadership programs at The MacRobertson Girls High School

Two such enhancement programs -*Youth Leaders International* and *Youth in Philanthropy Program* - were introduced at The MacRobertson Girls High School this year and form part of a comprehensive student leadership program.

Youth Leaders International is a student leadership developmental program that promotes international cooperation. Student participants take on responsibility for making a positive contribution to their local, national and international communities.

Two students are selected at the end of Year 9 and during Year 10 they work on a social service project which involves planning, fundraising, communication with the media and YLI headquarters in the US, report writing and evaluation. They are also required to meet regularly and discuss their project with the other schools in their group. These duties and tasks are purposely designed so that students gain valuable planning and management skills essential to effective leadership.

In July our students attended a World Leadership Conference in Washington DC along with student delegates from all over the world where the intensive program covered many aspects of leadership as well as the sharing of ideas and projects. Next year student delegates will attend a conference in Italy and in their third and final year the international conference is held in the UK. Each year involves the development of further skills and aspects of leadership. The program requires long term commitment and contributions in return for a quite unique opportunity for students with leadership ability to interact and network with their peers and learn from experts on a global scale.

The *Youth in Philanthropy Program* is a local initiative of the Lord Mayor's Charitable Fund aimed at community leadership development for young people. (The mission of the Lord Mayor's Charitable Fund is to improve the quality of life through the development of community philanthropy. Currently the Fund supports over 150 health and human care organisations including public hospitals, agencies working with drug addiction and homelessness, and services for the disabled, aged, youth and families.) The MacRobertson Girls High School was selected as one of four secondary schools to be involved in the initial program to establish Youth Grants Committees. Each Committee consists of six Year 10/11 students who are responsible for the distribution of Lord Mayor Charitable Fund grants to youth related community health and welfare programs.

Our six students participated in a development session covering areas of community leadership, an outline of the profile of the Lord Mayor's Charitable Fund and its activities, the grant making process plus the selection of a Committee Chair and Secretary. A member of the Fund's Board acted as a mentor and the girls were also able to observe a Board meeting of the Fund at the Town Hall. They then received six grant applications from youth related organisations for consideration and were able to visit some of these to see first hand their operations and activities. The next stage involved formulating and giving reasons for their recommendations. Next month the girls will attend the Fund's Annual Meeting to present grant cheques to the organisations they selected. The final activity will involve the preparation of a personal written review of the program.

The program has great appeal for students with a strong sense of social justice. The girls have found their involvement has expanded their understanding of the nature and scope of leadership and provided them with a very positive experience of how compassionate leadership can assist others.

We acknowledge and thank
The MacRobertson Girls High School for this article.

Special Education Roles...

...from my vantage point, she's deep in the sand-trap

Imagine you live in a world that is centred on the game of golf. Everyone plays golf Monday to Friday. Socially everyone talks nothing but golf. Imagine also in that world you play golf as well as you do in this world. As hard as you try, as much as you practise you could not even make it as Karrie Webb's caddie. Your gross motor skills and visual coordination are pretty ordinary to say the least. Instead of each day teeing off with the other golfers you are confined to the practice fairway. "How do you feel?" Well, you probably feel like most girls – and boys - in support classes.

Children in support classes know what the norm is and they are acutely aware of their inability to achieve it. They know the negative perceptions of their abilities held by many individuals around them. As a special education teacher it is vital to address this situation. It is important to encourage a student's self-esteem within a support program while at the same time addressing their academic challenges and aiding the development of self-acceptance, each is part of their growing process.

An individualised learning program is of limited use to a student if it merely consists of consolidating exercises with little expectation of continued development. While academic progress is easily plotted and assessed, too often the maturing, cognitive development of a student is neglected. This oversight can result in poor self-perception, a sense of failure and in the worst cases, self-loathing. Each is an impediment to academic work. It is a poor indictment for a school if any past student's recollection is one of being graded 'a loser'.

By Year 6 most children on the Support Program are well aware they are not working at grade expectations. This is indicated to them, and others, by term reports, comparisons of results, withdrawal from certain subjects, use of an adapted program in the classroom or a general realisation that they cannot contribute to classroom dynamics at the same level as peers. The risk of this becoming a defeating experience can be addressed by raising and reiterating the fact that school is a small component in our life experiences and is only one influence in determining who we are.

What role should a special education teacher play in a child's holistic education? Is adapting work and programs that will allow partial academic success sufficient in meeting a school's responsibilities to a child or, should the teacher be personally involved/connected with a student? If so, what is the scope of a support program?

I have adopted an honest, non-patronising attitude to these students in how I present work and how I discuss their progress with them. I utilise an English program adapted from the class text type studies with outcomes based on the lower Stage, yet encouraging an age-appropriate response to literature studies. More emphasis is placed on listening, talking, visualisation and verbalisation activities with the completion of a quality written product at the end. As a result, last term my students submitted their poems to the school paper and all were selected for publication. In addition, one literature response included making character puppets for a video presentation of a favourite chapter.

A mathematical assessment placed this particular group on a level approximately two years below their peers. I purchased textbooks for the students appropriate to their skills. I made no effort to disguise their level but discussed with them what the assessments had indicated and where we needed to go.

The students are now confident working at their level. As confidence grows more age-appropriate projects are included. Calculators are used to complete basic operations with the emphasis on improving 'estimating skills'. The students are making excellent progress and are aware of what they can now do compared with last term or last year.

Another technique I use is non-academic 'Time Out'. This may involve discussions, such as what constitutes 'dumb'. This topic had my students in hysterics as they discussed how I would possibly perform at an athletics carnival. Lucky for me they haven't seen me play golf! Another time-out resulted in a brisk walk around the block and the declaration of a 'no school morning', followed by morning tea at a local coffee shop. Once a term, as a reward for their efforts, we go out for lunch. These times have been most rewarding when, in a casual environment, I personally interact with my students and am privy to some of their fears and dreams.

While in pure academic tasks my students are making modest progress, they are growing in confidence. These students will continue to find school a difficult experience, a fairway full of sand-traps, but hopefully one which also recognises and encourages those skills and individual traits which are to be valued.

The first rule is to enjoy the game – given patience, the good scores will come.

We acknowledge and thank Anne-Maree Houston, Junior School Support Teacher, Meriden School, NSW for this article.

Students with Learning Disabilities: The Silent Sufferers...

...putting yourself into a child's shoes

Sufferers you say! Surely that is too extreme a term! Just for a moment put yourself into a child's shoes.

You're six. You've had to repeat Prep. You've had eighteen months of schooling and you can't read the word 'the' let alone anything else. Your parents have had you assessed and they know you have been identified as a gifted child with an IQ rating of over 140. They're worried and puzzled. You have begun to hate school with a passion and, as you are very smart, you are now beginning to perfect the art of being disruptive in class because you are good at it, and it gives you the recognition that you crave. Everyone else in the class is being praised for their reading and writing, and that avenue is closed to you.

You're eighteen. You have a history of ear infections as a baby and it was particularly bad between the ages of three and five. Things, however, improved with the ears shortly after starting school. School, however, was not a great place to be. Reading was hard, but with mum working with you and quite a lot of tears and shouting your reading wasn't too bad, but you hated it. It was **boring** so you only read when you had to. But if reading was difficult, writing and spelling were a nightmare and to this day you haven't 'got' it. Your spelling is like someone in Year 4 and you can't remember the difference between 'were' and 'where.' Your written expression is sloppy with capitals and punctuation forever being corrected. (Or maybe not. The teacher has given up too!) Worse still, you are not sure what the teacher is on about. It is difficult to concentrate in class and even more difficult to figure out what the words and concepts mean, so actually you've given up trying and as you are pretty good at footy/netball you are really exhausted from all the training, and you're having a bit of a doze at the back of the class. Besides this helps the image that you have tried to create with your mates/friends, that actually if you put in the effort you would be able to do the work. You just couldn't be bothered. What else is there to do to bolster your self-esteem? You can look forward to going home when the bell rings? Right? Wrong! The nightmare continues at home, because part of your problem is that you read at 50 words per minute. Your classmates read at 250 words per minute or more, so anything you have to study takes you five times longer just to read it! Your homework is never finished. Your mother is constantly nagging you and your little brother can easily do what you can't. There are not too many things to look forward to. This is suffering. The only time that it stops is in the holidays.

And what about the parents? It's hard to recall that first day of school when, with great pride and a tear or two, you looked at the youngster with the bright chirpy face, and a zest for life and you imagined the future, and you expected some sort of academic success like your friends' kids always seemed to be achieving. It didn't take long for the niggling doubts to set in. Reading homework was a struggle. The teacher said not to worry. The kid would eventually get it. But it didn't happen. Some teachers were kind and tried their best. At other times you were not so lucky. You had the ears tested and the eyes tested. You tried Kumon and kinesiology and maybe even the fish pills, which had Omega 3 and 6 in them. The reports kept on coming home with mostly B for beginning, sometimes a C for consolidating and never an E for established except perhaps in art or physical education. You spent your time trying to bolster your child's diminishing self-esteem through outside activities like scouting, ballet or sport. You argued with your spouse over what needed to be done and you were run ragged trying to compensate for the difficulties that the child was having. And then sometimes you just lost it and you got cross with this child who was just unable to deliver.

Spare a thought then for the families that have more than one child with learning disabilities. We know that a third of learning disabilities are hereditary. Some families may have all the children suffering in some form or other.

A Definition of Learning Disabilities.

What then is a learning disability? Here in Australia we make a distinction between a learning difficulty and a learning disability. A learning difficulty is a term that is used to describe students who have problems acquiring the necessary academic skills, because of low intellectual functioning, physical and sensory defects, emotional problems, inadequate environmental experiences and a lack of educational opportunities. (Rivalland, 2000) We are talking here about children who are partially or totally blind or deaf, have cerebral palsy, have had illnesses that have left deficits, who have been abused or perhaps have not been taught or been poorly taught. The reasons for the lack of learning are overt - they are easily identified and hopefully with the right help can be overcome. Modern technology has worked wonders in this area so that even students with almost no mobility, can access information on a computer and produce work through this medium as well. Once the physical obstacles have been overcome, the student has no difficulty understanding and learning the required material.

The difficulties encountered by the child with learning disabilities are covert. They are hidden within the brain of the child. Students with learning disabilities are defined as exhibiting problems in 'development and academic skills, which are significantly below expectation for their age and general ability. The disabilities which often include severe and prolonged directional confusion, sequencing and short term retention difficulties are presumed to be intrinsic to the individual but are not considered to be the direct result of intellectual disability, physical and sensory defects or emotional difficulties. Neither do they derive directly from inadequate environmental experiences or lack of appropriate educational experience.' (Rivalland, 2000) It's nobody's fault! So what is it?

In order to read and write effectively one needs to be able to see and hear and to hold a pencil, but more importantly one needs a brain that processes the incoming information correctly. The eye sees, but the brain has to discriminate and interpret. It has to see the fine differences in letters and notice the difference between an 'n' and an 'h'. It has to notice the order of sequencing which differs in words such as 'left and 'felt'. It has to store the words in a memory system so that they will be easily recognised next time they are encountered. The same processing is needed when listening occurs. The brain must be able to define the very subtle differences between the 'b' sound and the 'p' sound otherwise 'bump' sounds like 'pump'. The letters must also be conveyed to the brain in the correct sequence otherwise the meaning is distorted. Information that is important needs to be worked on effectively and immediately in working memory (short-term memory) and some of the information needs to be stored accurately for later recall. It is with some or all of these pathways that the learning disabled student has trouble.

Reading Disabilities

There are many reasons for failure in learning to read effectively. Essentially we learn to read through three cueing systems. Our knowledge of language and the meaning of words help us to predict what word may be coming - The Whole Language Approach to reading. Phonics or the sounds of the letters can help us work out words - The Phonic Approach. (Phonemic Awareness) Then ultimately we need a good visual memory that will store words that we have learnt in long-term memory, which is easily accessible - The Sight Word Approach. We need all three cueing systems in order to read effectively.

Children who have difficulty learning to read, often have one or more of these cueing systems not working efficiently. Children who are slow to acquire oral language may struggle with text because they are unable to predict what words could come next, and they also possibly have difficulty understanding what has been read. Children with poor auditory memories cannot remember the symbols for the sounds and find blending sounds into meaningful words difficult, so the phonic approach is slow for them. However, in some cases, it is the only avenue available for them to learn to read.

"The difficulties encountered by the child with learning disabilities are covert. They are hidden within the brain of the child."

Some children cannot distinguish between the fine differences in the letter shapes and then the sequencing of letters within words is unstable for them. Sometimes they read words backwards so that 'saw' is read as 'was'. At other times the eye appears to pick up a letter or word from ahead or the line above or below, or it misses a letter at the front or back of a word so that 'street' is read as 'tree'. Breaking words into syllables is difficult. They seem to have no mechanism that helps them to define logical breaks in words. The student with a poor visual memory has difficulty remembering words that have been presented. These students have great difficulty with the atypical words of our language e.g. where, laugh, through. Some children need fifty exposures to such a word before it 'sticks'. Others need to be taught using touch. A few of the errors mentioned can occur in one sentence. The text that results from such errors is garbled and makes no sense. The reader has to stop, and go back and try again. It is very frustrating and slows down the reading process significantly. The student who struggles with the visual aspects of text, as described, may be visually dyslexic.

Some students can 'crack the code' of reading relatively easily, yet still have difficulty understanding what they have read, and so read very little. This can be the result of oral language difficulties, poor vocabularies or very undeveloped visualisation skills, so that they do not imagine the story unfolding in their heads. Reading is, therefore, deemed to be boring and they prefer the television where the visual image is presented to them. Other students read very slowly so the message does not come quickly enough for the brain to use its whole language cueing system. We think much faster than we read, so slow readers get bored. Still other students may be able to process and understand a

storyline and the role of characters in a story but are unable to find and analyse the fine detail of text when reading for specific information or answering questions involving aspects of language and reasoning, such as synonyms, inferential reasoning and main ideas. Sometimes too, these students get lost on the page. They cannot remember where the information was, and have to read through the whole text again. At other times the problem can be related to more deep-seated language deficits.

Poor readers seldom choose to read, and this sets them up for further failure. Unless they come from very verbal erudite families or families who continue to read to them, their vocabularies become further impoverished in relation to their peers, and their innate knowledge of how our language fits together does not develop. Their general knowledge can be woeful. Eventually the reading and writing demands of the final years of schooling are almost beyond the level of their capabilities.

Writing Disabilities

Reading is much easier to acquire than writing. Reading involves recognition, however, writing involves total recall. The memory processes involved are much more complex, and multiple systems are involved. Therefore, one never finds a student who can write but not read. One frequently finds students who can read but not write.

In order to spell effectively one needs an efficient auditory processing system and a good visual memory. We need both processing systems to be intact. We need to be able to break words into syllables and then each syllable into its component sounds. Eighty percent of English words are phonically regular. However, an auditory system that does not hear the differences in sounds clearly, does not sequence the sounds consistently and then cannot hold the sounds in working memory effectively, is not going to help a student to become a good speller. Some students are dyslexic in the auditory channel. Other students are the victims of Otitis Media or glue ear. In their pre-school years they suffer with constant ear infections so that the middle ear is blocked with thick gooey muck. Medication relieves the infection but the sticky fluid remains unless drained through grommets. The result is that these children have a hearing acuity that is severely compromised sometimes by as much as 40%-50% at a critical time when oral language is at its peak of development, between the ages of three and five, depending on the child. The messages delivered to the brain are distorted or inconsistent as the hearing loss fluctuates. Permanent learning problems in the auditory channel appear frequently to be the legacy.

Effectively written text requires an intact oral language. If the students' oral language is compromised these students do not have the language within themselves to produce the written text of their peers. These are the children who sit for ages without putting pencil to paper because the creative process is for them quite daunting. They may on the other hand be willing to write, but words are omitted, some language structures are garbled, or worse still the text is just unrelated thoughts in no coherent form.

There is a third force at play in written language and that is the eye-hand coordination required of the fine motor system. Some children find it difficult to control the pencil, write on the line, produce legible handwriting and to write quickly. Some press too hard, or have incorrect pencil grips, which use the big muscles of the hand instead of the fine muscles of the fingers. Others are so bound up with the perfection of each letter that nothing ever gets finished. Yet others have difficulty orienting themselves spatially. Margins have little meaning in their lives.

Tail letters are always on the line. Some senior school students are yet to sort out the difference between the capital 'J' and the lower case 'j'. Dyspraxic students are the extreme manifestation of these difficulties. They have trouble organising and performing activities, poor self-help skills, poor gross-motor control, so running, climbing and jumping skills are uncoordinated, poor fine-motor control for activities such as tying shoe laces and doing up buttons and finally poor eye-hand coordination for the skills of writing and drawing. These handwriting difficulties cannot be dismissed just because we live in the era of the computer. The final exams at Year 12 are still written by **hand**.

Disabilities in Mathematics

While there is a huge body of research in the field of learning disabilities in the language area, the research in the area of mathematics is not as extensive or well defined. The reasons for poor mathematical achievement are complex. Perhaps one of them is cultural. ('I couldn't do maths so I'm not expecting much from Janie.' Janie is given an out before he even starts.) Poor mathematics can also be the result of ineffectual teaching methods. We ought never to lose sight of the fact that mathematical concepts need to be experienced in the practical before moving to the pictorial and then to the abstract representation. Mathematics should be 'hands on'. However, even when the cultural and teaching aspects of mathematics are effective some children still struggle.

Students struggling with mathematics may have difficulty remembering unrelated or isolated facts. The auditory dyslexic children struggle in this area. They cannot remember their addition and subtraction number facts. Sing-along tables done in the car are a nightmare, because they have poor auditory memories and need to be taught visually or through the medium of touch. These children just cannot remember what 'find the product' means. The names of the angles are confusing and then along come 'prime' and 'composite' and so it goes on. The whole language of mathematics is virtually

inaccessible to them, because they keep on getting muddled up with all the terminology.

Other students seem to have poor memories for processes and procedures. They seem to understand the work on a given day and even manage to produce several examples that have been correctly worked, but at the next maths lesson it has all gone and they have to start again. They have forgotten that the carrying number in the multiplication sum gets added after the number has been multiplied, and after the holidays the fractions that you have so carefully taught have definitely gone.

The student with dyslexia will also muddle the sequence of numbers and have difficulty with Roman numerals because they will not be able to remember whether six is IV or VI. Learning place value is often difficult for these children because the sequencing of fine detail is unstable for them (Dyslexic students often struggle with the reading of a musical score, especially with an instrument like the piano which requires the reading of two lines of notes simultaneously.) These students also have difficulty reading problem sums and instructions accurately.

There are a variety of other problems. Some students have difficulty at the concept formation level. Asking them to define the function of the decimal point reveals an array of answers of the most incredible kind. Other students may have mastered the processes but have difficulty with problem sums. They have a reading deficit or a language deficit which further complicates the issue. There are also the children who get lost spatially, so they cannot remember where to put the carrying numbers, or they find lining up the decimal points difficult and keeping addition digits in columns impossible. Others find it difficult to imagine the block that cannot be seen in a representation of a pile of blocks. (A visualisation deficit, or lack of experience with the real objects first?).

Then finally there do appear to be children who, despite excellent teaching, are just unable to grasp most aspects of mathematics. These children are deemed to be dyscalculic.

Other Learning Disabilities

A very general overview has been given about specific disabilities in reading, writing and mathematics. However, there are other learning disabilities of a more general nature. There are students who have attentional difficulties, apart from the children who have ADD - Attentional Deficit Disorder or ADD-H - Attentional Deficit Disorder with Hyperactivity. These children frequently have learning disabilities as well. In every class there is always the child who has difficulty, to some degree, of attending to the teacher or the task in hand. Without attention being focused, no learning can take place. Some children have difficulty selecting the important aspects of information which is being delivered. Other children have difficulty maintaining their attention. They are easily distracted, lose their train of thought, are sidetracked and unable to get back on task.

There are many forms of auditory processing disorders. There is a group of children, for example, who have auditory figure-ground difficulties. In a one-to-one situation they have no difficulty hearing what has been said, but as the background noise levels rise they have difficulty focusing on what the speaker is saying. They can effectively lose 40% of their hearing. Those of you who are getting older and a little hard of hearing, will recall what the last cocktail party or noisy restaurant did to your interaction in the conversation and your self-esteem. You will not find it difficult to empathise with these children, when you realise that this is their daily experience in the classroom. Neither will you be surprised that they do not appear to have learnt much. Following instructions is really hard when you have a garbled version of them. This can be compounded too, if your short-term or working memory only allows for one or two instructions before it is overloaded. Most classes rely heavily on the spoken word, so these students are continually disadvantaged.

Then there is the child who lacks organizational skills. You know the type. Something is always missing or lost - clothing, lunch, the specific book needed for a particular lesson, homework, the note for camp - and so the list goes on. Where does the breakdown occur? At the level of attention, the processing of information, memory both short and long, the carrying out of the instructions, the memory of where the article is, the forward planning required to have it at the right time, a lack of understanding of time and where they are in time, or a lack of will to achieve and please. Maybe it is a combination of a few of these things and sadly perhaps all aspects of the above are difficult for some children.

This is suffering, and for some children it is just too much. They eventually give up. It is too hard, and some of them get depressed. (There is such a thing as childhood depression.) Others become rebellious, class clowns, drop-outs or find solace in alcohol and drugs.

Others soldier on with the most amazing grit. They learn skills of perseverance and determination. They find other avenues where they can excel and carve out a place for themselves in the school community and the home environment. They find a way to motivate themselves in the face of tremendous hardship and setbacks. Often a parent loves and supports them unwaveringly and unconditionally through the whole procedure, particularly through the dark phases.

What can be done for Students with Learning Disabilities?

We have only just begun to scratch the surface of the causes of learning disabilities, but there is a considerable body of research that provides effective help for these students. After a thorough assessment of the student's strengths and weaknesses, an individual

program, carried out regularly by a trained special education teacher, can over a period of time make a significant difference to a student with learning disabilities. Half an hour's spelling in a group of ten students once a week, is not going to make any significant change to the functioning of any of those students. An individualized program needs to be carefully structured in little steps which allow the student to succeed. These students often require more time to learn than the average child, so stimulating repetition needs to be built into the program. Meta-cognitive strategies help too - teaching children to analyse their thinking and finding ways to enhance their learning. Strengths can be utilized to get around some of the weaker areas. A positive approach and little successes begin to rebuild the damaged self-esteem and to give hope where once only despair prevailed.

How likely is it that specialized intervention will make a significant difference to a child struggling with learning disabilities? There is no straightforward answer. It is a complex equation which involves the level of complexity of the learning disabilities within the child, the level of intellect of the child and the strength of the motivation. The skill of the teacher is important, plus the support of the family and the age of the child when help is undertaken. The earlier the start is made, the better. Children who are not acquiring oral language at an acceptable level before they start school should be having language intervention at the age of three or four. Kindergarten teachers are able to identify students at risk for learning difficulties, and no child should go past the second year of formal schooling and not have been given specialized help in reading, if they are struggling. However, while earlier is better, it is never too late to try. Technology has made the life of the learning disabled child much easier e.g. spellcheckers. There is a greater understanding of learning disabilities generally in the education system, although there are still teachers who deny that such a condition exists. Furthermore, many of these students are highly intelligent and talented with novel approaches to problem solving. Many go on to outstanding careers and fulfil the potential that their mothers perceived so long ago as they started on their first day at school. Names like Sir Richard Branson, Susan Hampshire and Cher spring to mind.

What happened, you may ask, to the six year old child who could not read? An assessment revealed that she was visually dyslexic. For her the position and orientation of the letters was not stable. She reversed or inverted them at will. A 'b' could be interchanged with a 'd'. An 'n' could be inverted and be a 'u'. An 'h' could be inverted and become a 'y'. And so on. Furthermore, she was aware of what she was doing and could verbalize what was happening. It took twenty one-hour lessons to stabilize the position of the letters, and then she did the same to the sequencing of the letters in words. Progress was initially very slow, but gradually things improved and eighteen months later her reading was up to grade level and now, as she enters senior school, she is the bookworm in the family with all areas of schoolwork well above average except for spelling which is just below the norm.

And what about the eighteen year old? A couple of assessments had been done at various stages of his/her schooling career, but little specialized help was available until Year 10. While tuition improved the accuracy of his/her reading, no progress was made in the speed of reading, so ways were found around the problem - books on tape, using study guides etc. There were many holes, and plugging them all was impossible in the time available. More holes kept appearing as illness, stress and tiredness took their toll. The final exams were eventually written with a somewhat poor mark achieved. Surprisingly, however, a placement has been gained in a university course on the strength of the excellent social skills that have been developed and a specific skill in a particular area. We wait to see how he/she copes with the course and we fervently hope that it works for him/her. He/she is one of the lucky ones. Many of our youth are unemployed and some are unemployable because they have not mastered the necessary skills of reading and writing.

A learning disability needs firstly to be acknowledged. Learning disabilities are varied and there are degrees of deficits. Empathy for the problem eases some of the suffering and heartache, and the feeling of isolation that is involved. Specialized assistance needs to be sought firstly at the school which the child attends. If this is not possible then help can be obtained from a variety of sources. See note below. An assessment will usually indicate where the child's strengths and weaknesses lie and the difficulties being encountered. It is then most important that there is a follow-up with a specifically designed program which is delivered on a regular basis until the problems are overcome. The suffering of the child with learning disabilities can be alleviated.

We acknowledge and thank Jenny Deyzel for this article.
[Jenny Deyzel was Special Education teacher at an independent girls' schools for thirteen years. She is now in private practice.]

Reference

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Note: A comprehensive list of resources for Assessments and Follow-up Programs may be found on the AGSA website in the *In Alliance* section.

Murder Under the Microscope...

...seeking environmental villains

Crime and detective work are just the sorts of intellectual investigations that gifted children enjoy. When that crime is environmental, with the murder victim being the Murray Cod fish, and the actual murderer being water consumption by landholders living on the Billabong Creek in NSW, the 'murder' is of course now 'under the microscope' and solving the crime is an exciting race against time and 1,600 detective teams from Years 5-8 throughout Australia.

Murder Under the Microscope is a joint initiative of the Department of Land and Water Conservation (DLWC) and the Open Training and Education Network (OTEN). It involves student detective groups investigating potential environmental 'victims', 'villains' and 'crime sites' over a four-week period each year via the latest technology. Clues are beamed into the classroom via satellite, SBS TV and Internet Broadcasts. The first part of the competition culminates in teams posting an accusation on the web site following the final day's broadcast. The second part of the competition entails groups submitting a catchment management plan to address the problems raised by the scenario.

For Class '5D', one of the classes in the gifted and talented Ad Astra Program at MLC School Burwood, the 2002 *Murder Under the Microscope – Rumble on the River* was much more than a project for the term. It was immersion in an investigation about which they became passionate and, as a result, they were awarded as the NSW Primary Winners of the Catchment Management Plan Competition, making them *Murder Under the Microscope Eco Planners*.

In solving the crime the Year 5 MLC team, *A Ripple in Crime* (a play on Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*), worked much like deemed experts, dividing the list of 20 suspects, 10 victims and 10 crime sites amongst the class of 18. Each girl became an independent expert on her allocated topics and, as such, an invaluable resource to the group.

"We shared a common understanding (of the process) and you couldn't afford to sit on the side and not join in. Your information could have been vital. If you were investigating the western swamp tortoise as a possible victim you were personally responsible for knowing everything about them," explained Judith Torzillo.

Having solved the crime, the real challenge was to submit a catchment management plan that could, realistically, be implemented.

"The best thing about *Murder Under the Microscope* is that it's real, not fake," said Annie Gribble. "Your solutions have to be realistic".

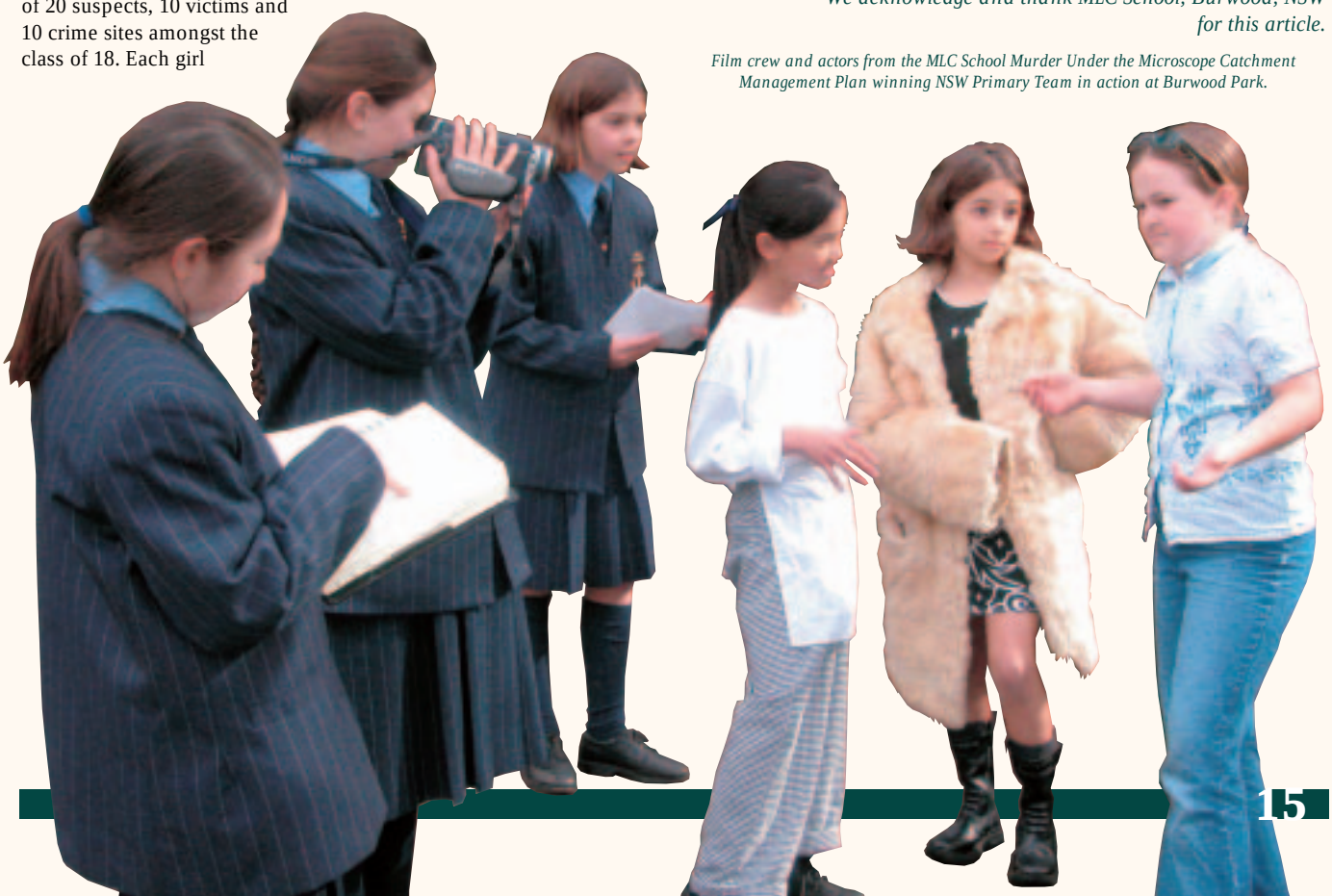
"You can't just charge the farmers $50 a litre for water or choose a solution that just creates another environmental problem," added Joanna Connolly.

As the girls had already been studying visual imagery, they chose to make an iMovie to present their management plan. They created their own 'broadcast' just like the ones they had watched on SBS. With an incredibly flexible and independent classroom approach for four hectic days they again became 'deemed experts' differentiating their skills and roles between report writing, script writing, filming, acting, editing, and even recording their own music sound track.

"It was a professional experience," said Christina White. "We didn't just learn how to solve a crime. We learned to specialise and to work effectively under pressure. Even though it was an intense level of learning it was so enjoyable."

We acknowledge and thank MLC School, Burwood, NSW for this article.

Film crew and actors from the MLC School Murder Under the Microscope Catchment Management Plan winning NSW Primary Team in action at Burwood Park.



Meeting the Needs of Gifted and Talented Students...

...danger of settling into a pattern of underachievement

Professor Eddie Braggett (1993) observed that *"children develop expectations about the level of work they are required to master, the standards which teachers expect, and the amount of effort that is considered appropriate. Those who find that they can coast along without undue effort may settle into a pattern of underachievement that neither stretches their own potential nor satisfies their individual expectations". It has long been recognised, at least throughout the history of compulsory formal education, that students who are significantly different from the norm need special provisions. They need a program that differs from the regular curriculum, designed with the majority of students and their level of ability in mind. The more significant the difference, the greater the degree of program differentiation needed.*

The requirements of gifted learners necessitate program modifications that are specifically matched to these needs.

Since the late 1980s Meriden has addressed the needs of gifted learners in a variety of ways including those outlined below.

Acceleration and Ability Grouping

This practice matches learners to appropriate curriculum. When students are grouped according to ability, their needs are less diverse and individual differences may be more easily catered for. Also when a student is placed at an appropriate level within the curriculum, which most closely matches their learning needs the extent to which material must be differentiated is greatly reduced. "Advancement of a year or two often brings the child closer to an appropriate level of challenge and pace and into contact with more intellectually stimulating peers" (Feldhusen, Proctor and Black, 1986, p. 26).

Early identification of students for whom acceleration is an appropriate option is essential. Checklists such as those developed by Clark (1983), Baska (1989) or Tannenbaum (1992), may assist in identification of students who are able to work at an accelerated level. This, in combination with other forms of identification, such as IQ tests, standardised instruments and above-level testing may be used as part of the acceleration process. Self, peer, parental and teacher nomination, where appropriate, may also be used.

If a student demonstrates ability well above age peers across subject areas, whole cohort acceleration is usually the most used option. Where a student demonstrates a particular strength in one subject area such as Science to a level where acceleration is necessary a form of flexible progression is required. Here there are two main options.

One is that the student remains in age cohort grouping for all other subjects and moves into a higher cohort group for classes in the single subject area. This is usually possible if classes in this subject for the year above are timetabled at the same time as the cohort from which the student is moving or the student attends classes in the single subject area at the level above and completes work in subjects missed during that time when age cohort has classes for the same subject.

Alternatively it may be necessary for a student to be given work at an accelerated level within their age cohort class. This option would also require the student to work independently at least some of the time. This work would be completed **instead of, not in addition to**, the regular class work given.

Acceleration needs to be arranged on a trial basis, with counselling available to the student as needed. The term 'flexible' in *flexible progression* refers as much to a requirement of teachers as it does to an administrative process.

Curriculum Compacting

This option is used in conjunction with other modifications such as extension work or as a part of the process of acceleration. The regular curriculum is designed to meet the needs of the majority of students. A great deal of material is repeated, both within topic areas and from year to year. The level at which most of the content is pitched is designed to meet the needs of the majority of students in a particular age group. Gifted and talented students need less repetition, they need to work at a faster pace and they need work which is intellectually challenging. Close examination of the regular curriculum reveals a number of areas which may be covered in less time or removed completely from a modified curriculum for gifted learners. Above-level testing can also be used to assist in identifying areas which may be compacted for gifted and talented science students.

The earlier compacting of curriculum and accelerated progression occur for these students, the more time they will have available to spend on the more academically rigorous aspects of senior curriculum and possibly tertiary level course work.

Independent Projects

In conjunction with other forms of curriculum modification, Independent Projects based on topics of personal interest can provide gifted students with time to explore aspects of a Key Learning Area (KLA) not always covered in the regular curriculum and can assist in motivating students for whom a particular subject area or KLA holds a personal interest. This option can of course be used with the whole class, allowing the gifted student, as well as all students, the opportunity to work at their own level of ability and interest. The internet can provide an excellent resource for initiating projects, motivating students further in an area of interest and providing current information and suggestions for work.

Within the area of Independent Projects students may be given the opportunity to enter some of the many competitions available throughout the year. These may provide a further focus for gifted

students and are often flexible in terms of content. It is highly recommended that gifted students present this type of research to a real audience. Presentations may be made to small groups of students, class groups, groups of students and staff or larger groups such as school assemblies or parent groups. These type of presentations provide a focus for consolidation of the research itself as well as recognition of individual abilities and efforts.

Mentoring

Mentoring is the linking of a student with an adult who shares a fascination in a particular field of interest. Mentorships are useful in offering gifted and talented students a level of expertise not usually available in the regular school setting. Mentor programs link individual students with community members with expertise in the students' area of interest (Forster, 1992). An alternative is to match students with mentors through the internet.

Differentiation within the Regular Classroom

Gifted and talented students who remain within their age cohort or who are accelerated and placed in mixed ability classes need to complete work within their program of study which is differentiated to meet needs in individual strength areas. Pre-testing may be used to determine a student's prior knowledge in a given topic area. Material with which a gifted student is already familiar or in which they demonstrate mastery may be omitted from their program allowing time for more in-depth research or extension. Differentiated work is of a level qualitatively different from the regular program. This may involve work within a topic being covered by the class but adapted to encourage higher order thinking skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Blooms Taxonomy, Bloom 1956). It may also include modifications to content, process, product or learning environment (Maker, 1982). Students identified as gifted need to be encouraged to be producers of information and apply critical thinking skills.

External Courses

Most major universities in New South Wales offer some form of programming usually in school holidays for gifted and talented students in various discipline areas. English, Mathematics and Science, Humanities and Creative Arts option areas are generally available within these programs. These programs provide gifted students with the opportunity to work with university faculties in their area of expertise, usually over a couple of days. They also provide an opportunity for gifted students to meet, work with and socialise with age peers who have similar interests and abilities. Information on these courses is usually sent to all schools or is available from the universities. Some schools also offer weekend or holiday courses or camps which are open to students from other schools. These are often advertised in "Gifted" published by the New South Wales Association for Gifted and Talented Children.

Social, emotional, affective and motivational needs are all recognised and acknowledged as important factors in the designing of educational programs and options for gifted and talented students (Clark,1988; Gross, 1989; Janos and Robinson, 1985; Silverman, 1993). Along with high intellectual capacity, gifted students may be more sensitive, more empathetic, more affected by the comments of others including teachers than other students of their age group (Dabrowski cited in Silverman, 1993). They may have a more highly developed sense of moral reasoning or tend to associate with older students (Gross, 1989; Silverman, 1993). These students may experience unusual "awareness, perceptions, emotional responses and life experiences" throughout their life span (Morelock, 1992,p.14). The need for specific counselling for these students as well as staff inservicing in regard to their affective as well as their intellectual needs is essential.

It is in fact only with a combination of several programming options that schools will be able to meet the diverse needs of gifted learners. Not all gifted children will require all the modifications mentioned above. In fact most gifted learners will benefit from one or two of these options throughout their school career depending on their level of giftedness and their individual learning needs. Many of these options will be familiar to parents and educators, however it is the combination of options that is important for schools to provide and for parents to look for in choosing a school that will meet their own daughter's needs.

We acknowledge and thank Meriden School, NSW for this article.

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A Thinking Community...

...teaching pupils how to think and getting pupils to think

We at Clayfield have long understood the need to develop our pupils' thinking abilities and believe that in this day and age all teachers in all disciplines do challenge their students to think, however we acknowledge that there is a big distinction between 'getting pupils to think' and 'teaching them to think'. Research by Perkins, Bellanca & Fogarty, has shown that pupils are generally expected to perform higher level thinking without having been taught and many equate good thinking with a 'well trained memory'. Howard Gardner (2002) reports that today the majority of people still consider that education is the process of transferring information from one person to another – "That's all! It is not necessary to understand the information; just to 'know it' – by memorisation". To overcome this attitude we see the need to provide our pupils with 'tools they can use', we have embarked upon a Thinking Programme where thinking skills and strategies are taught explicitly. Armed with these 'tools' we feel that our pupils will be better equipped to demonstrate their ability to perform higher-level thinking.

The emphasis in today's world is firmly on the development of people where it is assumed that some of the cognitive outcomes of education will be the ability to:

- solve problems
- gather information
- generate solutions
- evaluate solutions to be able to justify these
- understand one's own thinking

The underlying assumption is that once a pupil has advanced through the required years of school he/she will demonstrate these outcomes. In reality pupils may have been prompted and prodded during lessons but without the necessary tools and know-how are unable to demonstrate these outcomes spontaneously. Being taught a variety of thinking skills, strategies and tools is however, not enough. As with all learning and in order to teach for transfer, the new learning must be modelled, practiced, and coached within a safe and aware environment, else our performance will tend to remain below our propensity for the task. In using Thinking Tools and strategies during workshops with the students, assessing and evaluating curricula and extra-curricula activities as well as making our own thinking 'visible' the new learning becomes acceptable, applicable and hopefully embedded in our students!

Many words and phrases are bandied about in education settings, such as, critical thinking, higher order thinking, operacy skills, creative thinking, problem solving, decision-making, and brainstorming. Educators and students are being bombarded with an array of such words or phrases describing a variety of thinking skills. While different subject disciplines have specific content, the tools and strategies that are useful to conduct the different means of thinking are not well recognised or understood. Research has shown that the brain cannot complete more than one task at a time, unless one of the tasks is reliant on procedural memory. Generally it is assumed that our students (and we ourselves) can complete a variety of thinking tasks simultaneously, and achieve satisfactory outcomes. This is not so. The brain cannot function well under stress! De Bono believes that the essence of good thinking and the teaching of thinking '*is to focus attention directly on different aspects of thinking*', because '*most thinking takes place in the perception stage and is therefore a matter of directing attention*'. We employ a variety of tools and thinking strategies (Edward de Bono, Howard Gardner, James Bellanca, Robin Fogarty and others) to help enhance, clarify and simplify our thinking. The programme introduces our pupils to the understanding that 'intelligence' and 'thinking' are different and that 'thinking' can be taught, improved and learned. This knowledge alone seems to have empowered many students in that they become aware that they have control over their thinking, can improve it, can learn strategies and so, are able to become better thinkers.

In teaching Thinking tools and strategies **explicitly**, students are required to focus on the process and therefore become conscious of the process of thinking and then, once the skill has been learnt, it is integrated within the content. Metacognition is that part of the process whereby the student is encouraged to make connections. Opportunities are provided for students to use the new material, apply the new knowledge and so construct meaning. As many an experienced teacher knows 'the secret of success in learning springs from the student's ability to take information and cognitively integrate the new with the old'. This leads to meaning. Bellanca & Fogarty state that when given solid instruction, visual formats, clues and intense practice, each student has the chance to integrate the skills into a personally meaningful mental construct. This takes time!

The essential aspect of our Thinking Programme is to create a Thinking Community where good thinking is modelled, taught and mastered throughout the Clayfield Community. This is implemented and achieved through a multi-dimensional approach where part of the programme is 'learning the Thinking language together' (teachers and students) within an environment that encourages an attitudinal change to thinking, where the responsibility for thinking is given to the learner and where awareness and understanding of metacognition is created. In brief, to make our thinking:

- Broad and adventurous
- Deliberate and transparent
- Organised and focused
- Clear and precise
- Create time for thinking
- Fun
- Relevant

Hence our Thinking motto: We're all Learners, Learning Together!"

We acknowledge and thank Clayfield College for this article.

SCHOOLWIDE ENRICHMENT MODEL...

...one school's gifted and talented initiative

A new Schoolwide Enrichment programme for gifted students is proving highly successful at a New Zealand independent girls' school, Samuel Marsden Collegiate School in Wellington.

American educator Joseph Renzulli's Three Ring Concept of Giftedness has extended the possibilities for all students, identifying their strengths and developing their talents.

The programme makes identification of gifted students more comprehensive, using *creativity* and *task commitment*, as well as the usual *above average intelligence*, as prerequisites for inclusion.

Following identification, students are included in a "School Talent Pool" detailing their strengths in either academic or non-traditional areas. Non-academic domains may include creativity or leadership, or artistic fields. Standardised testing (PAT, STAR, NSW University testing) is used to identify academically talented students.

Programmes are then designed to fit the children's needs, with an emphasis on real life situations.

"We have a group of children who are exceptional at graphics and design, for example," says Mrs Judi Paape, the Director of Marsden's Lower School, where the programme has been implemented for girls aged 5 to 10 years.

"They worked with a graphic designer to create a new sign for our local St Mary's Church. They had a budget of $3,000 to $4,000 from the church and worked with real life mentors. We were proud that they completed the project within budget and on time".

Other enrichment experiences have included helping a professional artist to design and paint a mural on the Pre School fence; working with a children's author at a Young Writers' Workshop; as well as learning to write fundraising letters to businesses to support the local Hospice.

Renzulli's Three Ring Concept was first researched by Senior Syndicate Leader, Mrs Jenny Horsley, who is focusing on Giftedness and Talent for her Masters degree. Marsden was looking for a more comprehensive way of identifying gifted and talented students.

The concept has been adapted to meet the requirements of the New Zealand curriculum and the staff are very pleased with the results.

"It's a far more exciting way of teaching children," says Mrs Horsley.

"It enriches our planning and teaching. The teacher will say 'Challenge me. I'm not an expert. Let's go and find out.' This works especially well in the Internet age."

The *Schoolwide Enrichment Model* (Renzulli 1997) allows teachers to plan normal teaching units using three types of activities.

Type 1: The BIG problem. What is it we want to find out? What is the problem? Children are taught to question the topic.

Type 2: The skills for answering the questions are taught. Resources are researched.

Type 3: Real life situations are found to which all students apply their new skills and knowledge. The most enthusiastic and talented students are then extended by producing an actual "product."

Students are also able to nominate themselves for a Type 3 activity. They may choose to do an individual investigation of a topic that interests them.

Parental input is valued and staff are preparing a Parent Interview Form, in which parents will be asked to identify special traits or interests their children may have. This follows a well attended Parent Education evening held in July with Dr Tracy Riley, a leading New Zealand professor in the field of Giftedness and Talent.

The programme started in the Marsden Lower School (Years 1- 6) at the beginning of 2002 after a year of research. Mrs Paape believes it will take three years to implement it fully.

Early evidence collected by the Marsden staff, and positive parental feedback suggests that the SEM approach to planning and teaching is leading to high motivation not only among the gifted and talented, but also among all students.

"The success of the programme is giving the children and staff at Marsden's Lower School a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction, " says Mrs Paape.

We acknowledge and thank Samuel Marsden Collegiate School, Wellington, New Zealand for this article.

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AGSA DATES FOR 2003

Please put these dates in your diaries for 2003.

January 19-23 Student Leadership Conference to be held at Pymble Ladies' College, Pymble, NSW.

May 23-25 Annual Conference – *Knowing Women: Growing Girls* To be held at Loreto Kirribilli, Sydney.

Please contact Edwina Sear for any queries concerning either of the above conferences.

2002 Commonwealth Games, Manchester, UK...

...we congratulate the following members who had competitors in the Games

Lauriston Girls' School (Victoria)

Stephanie Moorhouse a Year 10 student at Lauriston Girls' School was part of the Australian Gymnastics team which won Gold at the Manchester Commonwealth Games. Stephanie is aged 15, and was accompanied by her parents to the UK. It was an amazing achievement by Stephanie who spends more than 30 hours each week at training.

Stephanie was welcomed back to school with a huge ovation in Senior Assembly and the strains of the national anthem. This was followed by a video of Stephanie's amazing gymnastics routine.

Pictured left: Stephanie Moorhouse with Anouche Boulom, Head of Kirkhope House.

Perth College (Western Australia)

The Commonwealth Games have been very special for the Year 10s at Perth College as one of their classmates, gymnast Sarah Lauren won two gold medals. She was part of the winning Australian team and also won the individual Floor Routine Gold Medal. Sarah was the youngest member of the Australian team at 14 years of age and her individual medal was an early present a day before her birthday.

There has been a flood of information on Sarah and her family (her 12 year old sister, Amy has also represented Australia) in the national press and media.

MLC School (Burwood, New South Wales)

In April of this year Penelope Blackmore stole quietly out of MLC School, Sydney, and Australia, and then returned to School during Term 2 to resume her Year 12 classes in the same unassuming way.

In the interim, however, Penelope competed in Rhythmic Gymnastics at the Commonwealth Championships, 2002, held in London. The Championships offered competition for Commonwealth countries in sports unable to be included in the schedule for the upcoming Manchester Commonwealth Games.

Penelope, and consequently Australia, won a Silver Medal at the Games in the Rhythmic Gymnastics Team Event competing for her country in Ball, Hoop and Clubs routines. This was one of two Australian Silver Rhythmic Gymnastics medals.

Penelope certainly sees the Commonwealth Championships as a career highlight although she is not new to international competition having competed in Japan, USA and New Zealand.

"The difference in this competition is that you perform on your own rather than in group competition. They announce your name and then the music begins," Penelope explained. "I was really nervous but I learnt to keep my mind on the job, instead of 'freaking out'."

After the success at the competition Penelope stayed in Europe for a few weeks competing and training. "Europe really is the centre of gymnastics and it was wonderful to take the opportunity to train there."

And if you think Penelope has been relaxing since she arrived home you'd be mistaken. She has also competed in the NSW Rhythmic Gymnastics Championships at Homebush, and leapt her way to a remarkable four Gold Medals and needless to say, the title of NSW State Rhythmic Gymnastics Champion!

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