

Consultant Notes

From the Consultants Committee Convenor, Ann Ryan

What an eventful season we have had with bushfires, drought and torrential rains in the mid to the northern East Coast. As a rural dweller, I was amazed that this did not stop ninety people attending our most recent professional learning event in Melbourne, at Treacy Centre, on February 2nd. Bookings closed early as we had underestimated the interest in this home-grown presentation, delivered by LDA practitioners. The interest in our role is encouraging and we were delighted to be able to share a little of our daily work with others.

Much of the day was given to presenting many, but not all, of the commonly used assessment tools that we use in daily practice – some of which are free to download and use. Presenters delivered an overview of each, answering the what, the why and the how of each assessment tool. Many managed to take questions at the end of their presentation.

Perhaps the level of interest can be partly explained by the fact that we were not selling products, nor were we claiming expertise in the best and most recent assessment tools. The day was about sharing what we use to inform intervention plans and program monitoring. Lyn Franklin, of Westbourne Grammar School, and Sarah Acome, of Bentleigh West Primary School, also spoke about the types of screening tools used in their schools. Both schools were able to track student learning growth with remarkable outcomes at surprisingly low cost. The results are quite an extraordinary testament to the change schools can make in student learning when they have a clear understanding of current student knowledge and the information to plan for projected and ambitious paths of progress. As Sarah said, her school had moved beyond running records and found something much more effective on which to base instructional decisions.

Olivia Connelly unapologetically repeated the call for greater attention to fluency. The LDA Professional Development Committee may soon share exciting news about our next professional learning event which will be music to the ears of Olivia and many others. Olivia also reiterated many times the value of reading the manual of an assessment tool. I couldn't agree more that these manuals have a wealth of research-based information to enhance user understandings. Most assessments presented were standardized and normed.

During the second part of the day, Consultant Specialist Teacher Practice was discussed. Again, following the format of what, why and how, information was shared on running a private business, the advantages and disadvantages, and particularly the motivations and joys. Few consultant specialist teachers will make an average teacher's annual income, despite often long hours and jack-of-all-trades problem solving. We need to be master of our own finances, our technology, our policies and procedures, communications and promotions – although most now take bookings through the LDA Online Tutor Search. Many others rely on word of mouth, knowing that the demand for service is great. Others have closed their books to new clients and have long waiting lists. All are motivated by a passion to make a difference in the lives of students who have experienced struggle in the classroom.

We recognise the need to grow the numbers of LDA practitioners. While it is expected that LDA Consultant Specialist Teachers will always retain their status of reliable, experienced and well qualified professionals with post graduate qualifications in the field of learning difficulties, there is also recognition at Council level that we need to expand our numbers if we are to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties. Having said that, there is strong recognition in the words of Steven Capp, recipient of the 2019 LDA Bruce Wicking Award, that *'we need to work together to ensure that all practitioners cease to see intervention as being separate from good teaching'*. Research shows us that an evidence-based approach to classroom teaching can have a significant effect on the learning outcomes of all students, including those with specific learning needs. LDA Council, during this

time of change and commitment to growth, are exploring ways in which we can respond to the need to expand the provision of interventionist practitioners to students with

learning difficulties, to reduce the number of students needing specialist intervention support, and to do so by assisting classroom teachers to develop better understandings of the day to day evidence-based teaching practices that will meet the needs of all students, including those with additional needs.

Online delivery offers one way to expand our reach and participants on the day appreciated the presentation by Lisa Phillips who showed how this can be done. Congratulations to Juanita Lee who brought this professional development day to fruition. Her organisational skills were commented on and earned this feedback, *'Wonderful, informative day'*. And thank you to Meredith Davies for somehow managing to have the right slide showing at just the right moment. Finally, thank you to the many speakers who freely gave their time and were rightly recognised by the survey comment of *'Engaging, professional and knowledgeable'*.

The PowerPoint slides of the presentation are available through the Member's section of the LDA Website.

Finally, a reminder that we are always keen to hear from qualified people who may be thinking about joining our team. You can ring Elaine on 0406 388 091, email consultant.convenor@ldaaustralia.org or contact Julie, enquiries@ldaaustralia, phone 1300 756 206

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For details about the process and requirements for becoming an LDA Specialist Teacher Consultant, please refer to the website www.ldaaustralia.org