

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

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### Abstract

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

### The Australian Remedial Education Association

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some of the most successful national links were

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

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

## **Membership and training**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Concern was also expressed about a new training course. In 1980 the Department of Education introduced

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

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

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

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

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

### **AREA Referral Service**

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

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

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

about AREA's approach to learning difficulties, its policies, and the services offered<sup>22</sup>.

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

### **Workshops, seminars and publications**

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

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

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

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

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

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

By the early 1980s computers were beginning to play

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Submissions and lobbying**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was a well-reasoned submission, but as the Ministerial Review turned its attention to integration into the mainstream of students currently in special schools,

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

## Administration

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

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

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

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

## Conclusion

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

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

## Endnotes

1. *AREA Bulletin*, Vol 5 No 4, n.d. [1973].
2. AREA Council Minutes, 5 August 1974.
3. AREA Council Minutes, 16 October 1980.
4. AREA Council Minutes, 5 April 1976, 2 December 1981.
5. AREA Council Minutes, 4 October 1982.
6. AREA Council Minutes, 1 March 1976; 8 February 1977.
7. Notice in *Australian Journal of Remedial Education*, 17 (2), 1985, p. 2.
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