Gilson College

November 2013, Issue 2

Learning Strategies Centre

The purpose of the Learning Strategies Centre (LSC) is to assist teachers and students with learning strategies. Currently there are approximately 30 students in the program. The LSC team consists of our coordinator, Jayne Dold and our support teacher, Jan Potter. The individual needs of each student are discussed with the teachers and the Primary Leadership Team.

Testing by professionals is arranged by the LSC team and funding applications are prepared on behalf of the students and parents. The team endeavours to keep abreast of any new developments or programs that may advance the learning of their students by regularly attending professional development sessions.

Meet Jayne Dold

Coordinator Learning Strategies Centre
Taylors Hill & Mernda campuses
Gilson College

Jayne has taught for over 20 years from Prep to Year 9 in NSW, QLD, Vic and USA, in both the private and public school systems.

Motto – **Reach for the stars! With the right attitude everyone can achieve his or her God-given destiny**

Dip Teach (Primary)
Dip Special Education
Grad Dip Reading and Language

The Editorial

A Small Strategy with Powerful Results

There is always something that can be done to make learning more enjoyable and satisfying for our children, whatever challenges they may be facing. In this issue I would like to emphasise the importance of positive reinforcement - a small strategy with powerful results.

Let me illustrate with a personal story. Many years ago when my son was in Year 3, I enrolled him in a school in the United States. I had home schooled him previous to this and so had a good idea of where he was at in all subject areas. I thought that the social aspects of school would be good for him, and, as he was social by nature, I expected him to enjoy school.

It did not take long, however, before I realised he was not enjoying school. I kept encouraging him, but things got worse. When I picked him up from the bus stop each afternoon, his little fists were clenched and he was breathing fire and brimstone against his teacher.

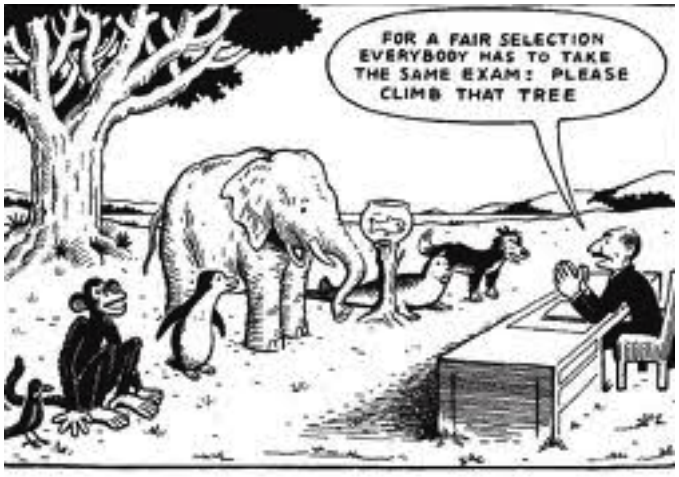
Looking at his workbooks I noticed lots of red crosses, and many negative comments such as *'Robert, you can do better than this!'* His work had certainly deteriorated and his handwriting was dismal. This bothered me, as I knew he could do much better, and his handwriting had always been good.

Eventually I removed him from the school and began to teach him at home once again. His written work, particularly handwriting, was barely legible and full of mistakes. What to do? I began by simply looking for things about his work to praise and ignored the rest.

I searched until I found one letter that was formed well. I put a star above it and said, *'Robert, I LOVE how you have written 'h'. That's SOOO good.'* The next day there were two good letters, the next six and so forth until his handwriting was once more a joy to read.

Students are referred to LSC by the class room teacher in consultation with the Primary Leadership Team (PLT). Speak with your child's teacher if you have concerns.

Always look for ways to reward and encourage your child. Your praise means everything to them, and can often turn a bad situation into a good one. Praise every attempt to please you, every attempt to be obedient - even if the results aren't wonderful, like inexpertly making the bed and setting the table!! Praise good attitudes and willing hands. Praise every attempt to do their homework. And above all LOVE them and let them know it by word and deed. The rewards for you as a parent will be immeasurable. You may bind them to your heart with a tie that will never be broken.



Some of the symptoms that will help you recognise potential Dyslexia

Not all children will exhibit all the possible symptoms of dyslexia as each child will have their own cluster of signs or symptoms. Some of the most common identifiers are noted below.

1) **A discrepancy between the pupil's ability and his/her actual performance** A child of average or above average intelligence from a supportive home who experiences difficulties with learning to read, spell or work with numbers, may be suspected as being dyslexic. The child may be very creative and achieve well in other areas, but will be one or two years behind the expected level in reading and spelling.
2) **Phonological processing and Visual Memory** Dyslexic children have problems with matching letters with sounds and with jumbled spelling. Their spelling is frequently phonic, ie 'dus' for 'does' and 'serch' for search,' or they may have all the letters in a word present but written in the wrong order, ie, 'siad' for 'said,' and 'becuase' for 'because,' etc.
3) **Difficulties with Reading** Dyslexic children and teenagers experience difficulties with visual tracking and remembering the visual shape of a word. They may omit a word or a line while reading, or read the same line twice, and even move their heads rather than their eyes while reading. The struggle to read words and follow each sentence takes away from the meaning of the text resulting in comprehension difficulties and fatigue. Auditory weaknesses may result in dyslexics being unable to appreciate rhyme or to identify small differences in sounds, such as the vowel sounds or voiced and unvoiced sounds.
4) **The Writing of Letters or Numbers Backwards** This is very common among dyslexics. They may confuse 'b,' 'd,' and 'p.' The number '9' is sometimes reversed and the upper-case 'B' is often used instead of lower-case 'b,' even in the middle of a word, because it's direction is easier to remember.

5) **Confusion over Left and Right** Dyslexic children and adults will often confuse left and right. There may be mixed dominance in some and in others dominance may not yet be established. Many dyslexic children are left-handed, or have relatives who are. There are simple tests which can be given to determine left and right dominance of the brain, eye and ear.

6) **Difficulties with Sequencing** Sequencing presents a challenge to many dyslexic children, therefore learning to count to 100, to say the alphabet, the days of the week or months of the year, and particularly the multiplication tables, presents a real battle.

7) **Dyscalculia** Approximately 90% of dyslexics experience problems in some areas of mathematics, in particular with learning the multiplication tables, telling the time and with word problems. They will often have difficulty in remembering a sequence of numbers and with holding them in working memory. It is not uncommon for dyslexics to write numbers backwards, ie, '41' for '14'.

8) **Difficulties Copying from the Board** Dyslexic children often have a weak visual memory and difficulties with visual tracking; therefore copying notes from the teacher's board is hard. They forget the spelling of words as they look down at their notebook, and find it hard to re-locate their place once they look up again. A significant number find it hard to read writing on a shiny whiteboard because of the glare.

9) **Difficulties with Organization** Dyslexic children experience genuine difficulties with planning and thinking ahead. They appear to live their lives in a mess and need help with order and self-discipline.

10) **Difficulties with Multi-Step Instructions** This is to be expected as such instructions involve both sequencing and auditory memory skills.

Did you know:

That dyslexics make great entrepreneurs? According to dyslexic millionaire businessman Adam Norris, "many people at the very top of business have dyslexia, but dyslexics are often turned away or fail to push on because of their difficulty in learning to read or interpret words. However, dyslexics are often astute at creating ideas and have remarkable vision, while their work ethic to overcome their issue often sets them apart." – News.com.au

We are limited only by our attitudes.

Dyslexic Sir Richard Branson - founder of Virgin Group of more than 400 companies

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Meet Jan Potter

Support Teacher
Learning Strategies Centre
Taylor's Hill Campus
Gilson College

Jan has been teaching since 1970, generally in small, one teacher sized schools within Australia, Papua New Guinea and Kiribati.

Jan has experience in various Adventist and government schools, including working with learning disabled adults and children.

During a fifteen year stint away from teaching she taught folk and decorative art to adults, opened an art gallery in the Hunter Valley and published two embroidery books.

Jan says, **"I understand there is an imaginary line of average intellect, but everyone spikes above and below it to some degree. That's why learning is a lifelong occupation, there's always something to learn.**

Dip Teach (Primary)

Physical Skills of Learning

Learning is not something that is just a function of our mental ability; it involves programming of muscles by the brain as it develops new pathways as a result of the use of both sides of the body and brain. Integrated play is an essential part of early learning for this reason.

"From the simple act of organizing the musculature for sitting or walking to the more complex task of coordinating the eyes, ears, and hands to write, learning always involves patterns of physical activity." 1

The Brain Gym 26 have been designed to help learners tap into their own movement path and extend it to broaden and develop new pathways to areas of understanding.

Brain Gym develops skills of organization and stabilization.

For movement skills as a whole it develops:

- Stable balance for sitting, standing and walking
- Establishment of the sternum as a central reference for directional movement and postural alignment (great preparation for reading, writing and computation)
- Differentiation between horizontal and vertical planes

For social and emotional skills it develops:

- Relaxed breathing and physical equilibrium for self-calming
- The ability to manage impulses
- The ability to engage with others
- Connection through listening verbal cues and gestural responses
- Awareness and respect for personal boundaries and physical limits
- Ability to incorporate creativity and imagination in active play

Brain Gym develops skills of focus and participation - through gross and fine motor movement it develops:

- Awareness for spatial mapping and body image
- Interpretation of special directions
- Sustained attention
- Seeing near to far (e.g. looking from desk to board)
- Mobility of the shoulder girdle (develops reciprocal thumb and finger movement for writing)
- Visual/auditory/kinaesthetic/tactile congruency

Next issue we can look at some of the communication and processing skills Brain Gym can develop in our children.

Jan

1: Brain Gym Teachers Edition, Paul E. Dennison and Gail E. Dennison

2: This article was paraphrased from Brain Gym Teachers Edition, P. E. Dennison and G.E. Dennison

Please note Brain Gym exercise books are available just ask Jan!

Working Collaboratively

In our last newsletter we looked at the way simply drinking more water can improve brain function and behaviour. Over the next few issues we will take a brief look at nutrition.

There are definite links between effective learning and good nutrition. Brains need constant energy, so it is vital to keep blood sugar levels up during study times to maintain concentration. This does not mean consuming more sugary foods, but rather consuming more complex carbohydrates such as whole-grain cereals, fruit, vegetables, nuts, seeds and legumes. These release energy slowly over several hours and thus maintain energy levels between meals.

The Number One Rule is a good breakfast. This includes whole grains like oatmeal, millet or quinoa porridge, and whole wheat bread and protein rich foods such as nuts, beans, milk, soy products, egg and yoghurt. And don't forget raw or dried fruit for essential vitamins and minerals.

These foods will lift energy levels and improve learning ability. It may mean getting up a little earlier, or doing more preparation the night before, but the effort is well worth it if you want your child to have a healthy 'switched on' brain in a strong, healthy body.

Helping the Students

Psychologists
Cathy Catroppa,
Dept. of Psychology
Royal Children's Hospital

Speech
Georgina Lemke
Lemke Speech Pathologist

Mina Pastori,
Speech Pathologist

Occupational Therapy
Louise Ogilvie
Carolyn Ash
Everyday Independence

Reading Recovery
Sharon Vodell

Brain Gym
Jan Potter

The LSC team would like to express our gratitude to Cindy Drake for making this newsletter possible. Without her creative ability, encouragement and gentle pushing, this newsletter would probably have remained just a dream. And thank you Amanda Pedis for the professional touches!

48 Ways to Improve Your Child's Attention Span and Behaviour

(Dr Ian Lillico, former principal and international educational consultant)

Number 3: Limit Television and Video Games

There is evidence that frequent changes of camera and focus may actually program a short attention span. Television advertisers capture a viewer's attention by capitalizing on the brains instinctive responses to danger through the use of sudden noises, close-ups, zooms and bright colours and may be reducing the child's natural ability to remain focussed on events in the real world.

There is substantial evidence that television watching can promote aggressiveness in children. "By beholding we become changed into the image of what we watch," a very sobering thought. Television and video games also take children away from activities that are more active, multisensory and intellectually, socially and emotionally nourishing.

Learning Activity – Rhyming Games

Children have a natural love of rhyme. Recognising and creating rhyme helps them develop an understanding of how letters sound and to hear sound patterns in similar words.

The game 'Memory' can be played with a stack of picture cards with matching sound pictures such as brick and stick or sock and lock. When the child turns over a matching rhyming pair, he removes those cards and continues until all the matches are found.

'Odd One Out' also uses picture cards to play a simple game. Display three picture cards, two of which match or rhyme. Have the child find the odd one or non-rhyming word in the set.

'Rhyme Tic Tac Toe' is played by putting children into teams. One team is X, and the other is O. Have a tic tac toe grid filled in with simple words. For instance, Team X chooses the centre square which has the word "tip." They say "lip." That's a correct rhyme, so an X is placed over the square. If they did not give a correct rhyme, no X is placed, and the word remains uncovered.

From Parent to Parent …..

It was our first professional assessment, and I was already defensive. She said our child had a behaviour problem which should be evaluated by a paediatrician. 'How rude,' I thought. 'That was a quick judgment by someone we had only just met.' However, I recognised that something wasn't quite right with our child so I was keen to see a paediatrician and get a second opinion. To my surprise the paediatrician immediately picked up symptoms and had us referred to the genetics team at the Royal Children's Hospital.

The genetics team explained to us that our boy had symptoms of "Noonan's Syndrome" and explained what having this syndrome would mean. This information, plus what I gained from my own research, prepared us for the many little things that could go wrong. The big items were grommets, then glasses, then changes to the diet and sleep patterns. We were gratified to note that our child's behaviour changed dramatically for the better once these changes were implemented. Life became almost normal once again, however the occasional relapse reminds us that we need to remain vigilant and keep on top of the situation.

We had approximately 10 different specialists helping us for about 18 months. It was exhausting, but we learned much a long the way. Since this experience our approach now is to:

Keep open the lines of communication Stay proactive with your child's education. Remember your child is not the only one the teacher/specialist has to look out for. Cooperate with the teachers/specialist as they work to get the best results for your child.

Involve a team approach This has been really helpful in providing consistency with the teacher and classroom environment to our home learning environment. Also take the best professional advice from a group of relevant people.

Don't be defensive but be willing to challenge and discuss a diagnosis, and to look for the best possible outcome for yourself and your child.

Be clear about your goals Write them down, are they real and achievable? Do you need help setting the goals? Celebrate all wins, no matter how small.

Stay calm, collected and positive Go into meetings believing that everyone at the meeting wants to help. If you say something you regret, immediately apologise and get back on track. These times can be emotional but all are working towards the same goal.

Be prepared to try new solutions You have the advantage of knowing your child better than anyone else. You are not 'part of the system' and may have ideas that the team has not thought of. Do your research.

Academically, life will always be a challenge for our child, but that doesn't bother us too much. He has a wonderful caring nature, a great sense of humour, and the kids love him. Ensuring that he has a happy life and the necessary skills to equip him for whatever he wants to do is our life goal for him.

Do you have a story you could share with other parents? Then let Jayne Dold (jayne.dold@gilson.vic.edu.au) know. If you prefer, you can remain anonymous.

Useful Resources

Have you tried accessing information from the Internet to help your research? There are many different ways to gain support through the Internet such as:

Blogs – these are discussion or informational sites for people with common interests
Internet Forums - discussion boards
Websites – is a set of related web pages served from a single web domain. Websites have many functions and can be used in various fashions; a website can be a personal website, a commercial website, a government website or a nonprofit organization website. Websites can be the work of an individual, a business or other organization, and are typically dedicated to a particular topic or purpose.
Web search engines – software systems designed to search for information on the world wide web. Common search engines include Google, Yahoo, Mozilla Firefox, Bing
Applications (Apps) – computer software that causes a computer to perform specific tasks beyond the running of the computer itself

Some Useful Application's for learning

GrassHopper
Includes apps for Counting, Matching, Patterns, Puzzles, Readers, Sorter, Speller, Sight Words
*Try I Like Books – 37 Picture Books for Kids in 1 App

The Elements: A Visual Exploration
for chemistry students

Britannica Kids
Encyclopaedias come alive

Innovative Mobile Apps
Includes apps for spelling, tracing, sight words, sounds, touch and learn, phonics, story creator, memory, matching
*Try Montessori – Things that Go Together Matching Game for Kids
*Try Learning Patterns – Help Kids Develop Critical Thinking and Pattern Recognition

ABC Reading Eggs
Alphabet, numbers, phonics, speak and listen, words, spelling, maths
*Try Targeting Maths

Demografix Pty Ltd
School Writing

How it Works: Machines by Geek Kids
An introduction to engineering

Alligator Apps
Flash cards, learn to read, memory, touch and learn (includes emotions)

National Geographic World Atlas
with detailed statistics and information

Time Timer
A visual timer (great for autism, ADHD, etc)

Funding Opportunities

The school will pursue opportunities with government where possible to assist and support your child's education learning needs, however government funding can be hard to obtain. Discuss any funding opportunities with the LSC team. Key dates are typically end of February for new students and end of August for existing students. This means all assessments and forms need to be completed and submitted by these dates.

Contributions

If you have any information that might be useful to share with other parents, please let Jayne or Cindy know. You can email any items to jayne.dold@gilson.vic.edu.au or Cindy.Drake@dtpli.vic.gov.au