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Supporting students with learning difficulties in a school of the air

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Supporting Students with Learning Difficulties in a School of the Air



Judith Rivalland, Mary Rohl and Pru Smith



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in partnership with

**The Centre for Inclusive Schooling Learning Difficulties Team
(Department of Education)**

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Overview

Introduction

This project was funded by Edith Cowan University and the Centre for Inclusive Schooling (Department of Education, formerly Education Department of Western Australia) as an Institute for the Service Professions Collaborative Grant. It was carried out in order to examine the following questions:

- What are the ways in which identification, assessment and teaching processes make provision for students with learning difficulties who are enrolled in a School of the Air?
- In what ways do Support Officers Learning Difficulties support these children, their home tutors and their teachers?

Background to the study

Several factors have impacted on the need for this study. A recent report, *Mapping the Territory* (Louden, Chan, Elkins, Greaves, House, Milton, Nichols, Rohl, Rivalland & van Kraayenoord, 2000), was commissioned by the Commonwealth Government to provide a national picture of how students with learning difficulties/disabilities are supported in their literacy and numeracy learning in regular school settings and to identify successful strategies for addressing the literacy and numeracy needs of these students. The study found that support for Australian children with learning difficulties is provided in a range of contexts: in secular and religious schools, in conditions of social advantage and disadvantage, under a range of funding regimes and ideological frameworks, and in eight states and territories. It also found that these contextual differences lead to differences in the operational definitions of learning difficulties, patterns of identification, estimates of prevalence and services available to children. Some of these differences were observed at the level of school sector or system policy; other differences depended upon policy interpretations and professional judgements in individual schools. Funding for the *Mapping the Territory* study did not allow for the inclusion of students with learning difficulties who live in remote and rural areas of Australia. The present study provides this perspective.

Another factor that has impacted on the present study is the restructuring of the Education Department of Western Australia in 1998. This led to the devolution of power from the Perth central office to education districts and the Centre for Inclusive Schooling was established to provide support to district offices and schools in their work with students who have learning difficulties and disabilities. A new model of service for students with learning difficulties living in remote and rural areas who are enrolled in Schools of the Air was also developed in 1998, in order to bring services in line with a district supported model. This new model involved the training and appointment of a Support Officer Learning Difficulties (SOLD) for each of the five WA Schools of the Air (SOTA). The Support Officer Learning Difficulties positions were made at Public Service Level 5 and created for a three-year period.

The Support Officer Learning Difficulties positions were established to replace the function of the Chidley Education Centre. The following description of Chidley's evolution and functions is taken from the *Information Kit, Expression of Interest* document written in 1999 by the District Service Centre - Learning Difficulties (now the Centre for Inclusive Schooling) of the Education Department of Western Australia.

Chidley Education Centre

The Chidley Education Centre was established in 1976 as a residential facility for primary age students with learning difficulties who lived in isolated areas of Western Australia. The centre targeted students with an average IQ who were at least two years behind their chronological age in reading. It provided a facility comparable to the remedial centres that operated on a student withdrawal model throughout the metropolitan area in the 1970s.

In the mid-1980s significant changes in Education Department philosophy and policy were made. Theory of the time emphasised the importance of inclusion and the long-term benefits of empowering teachers/home tutors to address the needs of individual students. These changes saw the phasing out of remedial centres; students who previously had been withdrawn to remedial centres remained the responsibility of mainstream classroom teachers. Throughout this transition Chidley continued to provide a remedial service on a withdrawal basis for students from remote and rural areas.

In 1993 Chidley began to implement changes that shifted services and support from the student towards the teacher/home tutor. The 1998/9 New Model Trial resulted from the joint efforts of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA) and the Education Department of Western Australia. The new model of service was developed after considerable consultation with all stakeholders and resulted in the closing of the Chidley Education Centre while the new model was trialed.

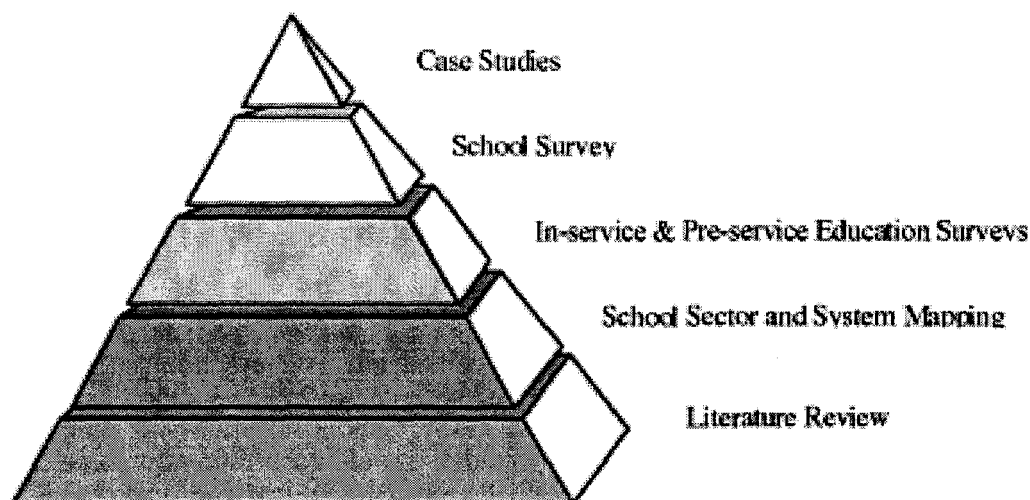
The Isolated Children's Parents' Association supported the move to the new model, as they perceived a gap in service provision for students with learning difficulties in remote and rural areas. The Education Department of Western Australia, in consultation with the Isolated Children's Parents' Association, set out to provide a service that was seen to be cost effective and able to cater for greater numbers of students than were being catered for by the Chidley Centre. This Centre was able to cater for a small number of children only and some parents found it difficult to spend the required amount of time away from home and to implement follow-up programs on their return.

A training package for the Support Officers Learning Difficulties was designed by senior staff members of the Chidley Education Centre and focused on acknowledging the existing expertise of the trainee Support Officers Learning Difficulties. It used a collaborative problem-solving model and encouraged the Support Officers Learning Difficulties to challenge their assumptions of how students learn. There was a strong emphasis on how to operate in the field with others who were involved in the education of students with learning difficulties. Support Officers Learning Difficulties were trained in the use of a range of assessment measures and teaching strategies.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study was based on that of the *Mapping the Territory* study, which adopted a multiple method approach to the research. The *Mapping the Territory* research design attempted to provide both a comprehensive national overview and a close-up local view of the circumstances of individual children in particular school settings. To this end, five separate data collection strategies were developed: a literature review, mapping of sector and system provisions, surveys of pre-service and in-service education, a survey of school-level provision, and a set of school case studies. Together, these methods allowed for progressive focussing on issues. The data collection strategies that were used in the *Mapping the Territory* study are represented graphically in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Data Collection Strategies



The *literature review* provided the broadest layer of information. This review drew on a wide range of international English language resources, focussing especially on information available in refereed academic journals (see Chan & Dally, 2000). More than 400 sources were cited, providing an authoritative account of definitions of learning difficulties and disabilities, problems encountered by children in developing literacy and numeracy, instructional techniques and programs, approaches to service delivery in regular school settings, and program evaluation.

At the next layer of the research pyramid, the *school sector and system mapping* project provided a snapshot of sector and system provision for children with learning difficulties. The primary data source for this layer of the study was a series of interviews with officials in school sectors and systems, conducted late in 1998 (see Rivalland & House, 2000). Interviews were held with the government, Catholic and other independent school sectors in each state and territory. Face-to-face and telephone interviews were supplemented by documents provided by school systems and sectors. Participants were asked to comment on their school sector's or system's approaches to the research issues, that is: definitions, identification, prevalence of learning difficulties, programs and strategies, arrangements for funding, preparation of support staff, use of private providers, program evaluation, and reporting procedures.

The third layer of the study focused on *in-service and pre-service education*. National provision of pre-service education for teachers of children with learning difficulties and disabilities in literacy and numeracy was mapped through a study of university handbooks and web pages (see White & Elkins, 2000). There were 31 universities providing pre-service teacher education. Summary analyses were prepared for one- and two-year graduate entry programs and four-year programs in primary and early childhood education.

Data on provision of in-service education were collected through a survey of professional associations and employing authorities, individual university staff and private service organisations (see van Kraayenoord & Treuen, 2000). A database of agencies providing in-service education was developed, including community organisations, professional organisations, private providers, state education and health departments and education agencies in the Catholic and independent school sectors in each state and territory. The questionnaires asked for information on the focus area of courses (literacy, numeracy, special education), course duration, frequency, number of participants and funding. Respondents were also asked to comment on the skills and understandings they thought to be necessary for teachers of literacy and numeracy to children with learning difficulties and disabilities.

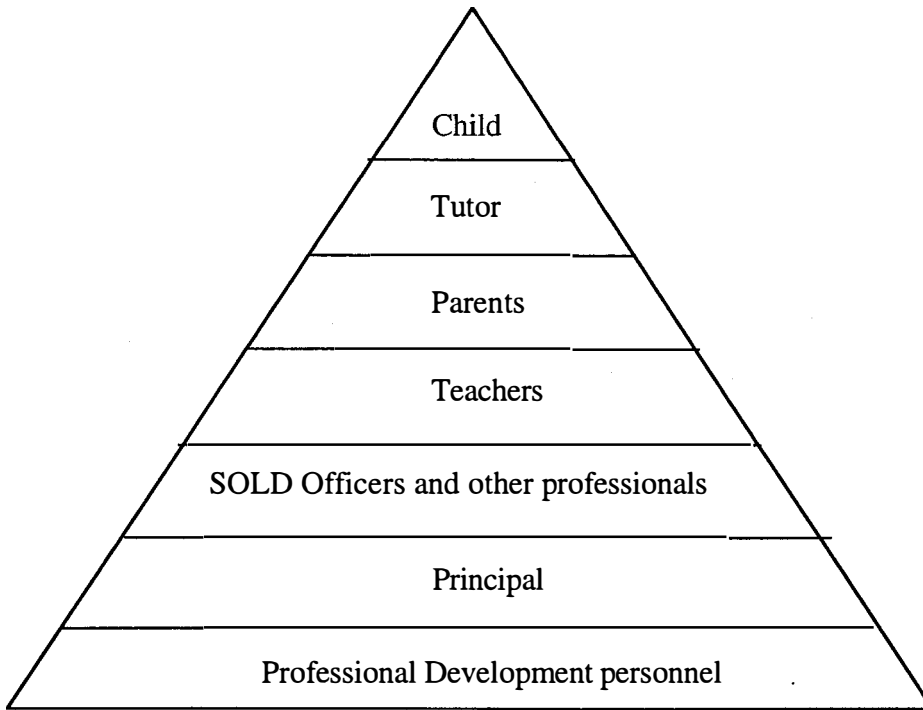
The fourth layer of the study, the *school survey*, used quantitative research techniques to provide a national overview of school-level provision for primary children with learning difficulties and disabilities in literacy and numeracy (see Rohl, Milton & Brady, 2000). Questionnaires were sent to 1,000 schools sampled from a national database of 8,199 schools provided by the Australian Principals' Association Professional Development Council. A total of 392 questionnaires were returned, of which 377 were useable. The sample of 377 valid questionnaires was generally representative of the whole database in terms of states and territories and school sectors. For each of the 18 questions, frequency of responses was calculated for the whole sample. Subsequently, responses from states and school sectors were compared.

The fifth and final level of data collection, the *case studies*, used qualitative research methods to explore the same set of issues considered in the school survey. Twenty schools from New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia were chosen for participation in the study. School selection was guided by the project brief and by the belief that the case studies should each represent some aspect of excellence in their provision for children with learning difficulties. The final set of 20 case study schools was also selected to represent a cross section of school sectors, locations, school sizes and socio-economic circumstances of parents. A pilot case study was completed in 1998, using narrative case study methods familiar to readers of other Commonwealth Children's Literacy National Projects (for example Breen, Loudon, Barratt-Pugh, Rivalland, Rohl, Rhydwyn, Lloyd & Carr, 1994; Loudon & Rivalland, 1995; Breen, Barratt-Pugh, Derewianka, House, Hudson, Lumley & Rohl, 1997). Feedback by researchers and members of the project's advisory committee shaped the revision of the pilot case study and the development of the common case study data collection plan. For ethical reasons, schools, teachers, parents and children were identified by code names and some identifying details were changed.

Data collection included interviews with teachers, school administrators and parents, analysis of school documents, and observations of individual children in classrooms and other contexts. Data were recorded in verbatim notes or transcripts of audio-tapes and written field-notes. In order to reduce the difficulty of cross-case analysis, each case study was presented in a common format. The first draft of each case study was reviewed by another member of the research team, revised and returned to schools in accordance with ethical requirements agreed by the researchers' universities and negotiated with individual schools.

The present study was informed by the results and methodology (including data collection and analysis) of the *Mapping the Territory* study, in particular the case studies of 20 schools. The multi-layered case study of one School of the Air in the present study closely followed the case study methodology of *Mapping the Territory*. Figure 2 shows the participants involved in the School of the Air case study.

Figure 2: Participants in the School of the Air case study



The School of the Air context

The study took place within one School of the Air in Western Australia in the third year of the Support Officer Learning Difficulties project (2000). Children who are enrolled in a School of the Air either live in such geographical isolation that they do not have access to a regular school, or they have particular health or social circumstances that prevent their attendance at school. The school in this study has an enrolment of approximately 70 students and is staffed by a school principal and 8 teachers. Each teacher manages a class of 8-10 students and is responsible for the delivery of a daily half-hour class lesson by radio. Further communication, where necessary, is conducted through phone or email, a minimum of three home visits to each student every year and further contact through camps and seminars held at the School of the Air. Teachers report on student progress at regular intervals. These reports are forwarded to the principal and parents of the students; thus the teachers maintain a reporting cycle that also informs parents on a regular basis.

The schoolroom for students of the School of the Air may be an allocated space within the home, such as a bedroom or kitchen, or sometimes a purpose-built room. The program is delivered by home tutors who are usually parents, most often a mother; a few families employ a tutor who may, or may not, be a trained teacher. The home tutor plays a critical role in the students' education by supervising work and liaising with the teacher, school principal and Support Officer Learning Difficulties. This requires a great deal of time and commitment by home tutors, not all of whom have the educational background, time or economic resources to fulfil these obligations. Parents/home tutors responsible for the education of a child with a learning difficulty often feel frustrated, inadequate and weighed down by their responsibilities.

One source of curriculum and materials for the students is the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) in Perth. The SIDE materials are despatched for specific year levels and are to be completed in sequential order. Students with learning difficulties are

not usually able to complete the set work within the allocated time-frame. Before the appointment of the Support Officer Learning Difficulties to the school of the Air that was the subject of this study, teachers were reluctant to adapt the materials for individual needs. Further, some tutors felt inadequate when their children were unable to complete set work

The role of the Support Officer Learning Difficulties has been to support teachers and home tutors in working with students who experience difficulty in learning. This involves guidance in appropriate assessment for these children, helping teachers and tutors devise behaviour management programs, the identification of students' learning needs and support for teachers to develop Individual Education Programs. The introduction of the Support Officer Learning Difficulties has helped teachers and home tutors feel confident to adapt set materials for the specific needs of students with learning difficulties. This adaptation of materials may involve consideration of different cultural and geographical contexts. Support Officers Learning Difficulties also organise and co-ordinate other support services external to the school, such as health, welfare and allied services.

At the end of each year the teacher and Support Officer Learning Difficulties assess students who have been working on modified materials or an Individual Education Program and a summary of the program and further recommendations are recorded onto an end-of-year hand-over report. Parent and home tutor issues are also noted, along with ways in which these issues have been addressed and the outcomes of any action taken. This document is then shared with the principal and the student's next teacher. It is retained as a record by the Support Officer Learning Difficulties and the school principal. The success of the modified program is monitored regularly, and evaluated at the end of the year to ascertain whether or not the student remains in the 'at risk' category. Some students will remain in this category for a long period of time, whereas others will overcome their difficulties more easily. The relationship between the Support Officer Learning Difficulties, teacher, home tutor and student plays a critical role in the success of the educational program.

The students

Bill

Bill, who is 10 years old and in Year 5, lives on a sheep station owned by his parents. As his two older brothers attend boarding school in Perth, Bill has chosen the kitchen as his schoolroom in preference to the family purpose built schoolroom. His mother, who is a qualified teacher, is his home tutor. Bill is encouraged by his parents to participate in the family tourist business as this boosts his confidence and self-esteem. He also assists in station work by driving workmen to their places of work, pulling noxious weeds from the paddocks and he has been involved in the construction of a yabby tank.

Bill has been enrolled in the School of the Air since Preprimary. In his third year of school, his home tutor expressed concern about his reading which, until this time, had appeared to be at year level. After discussion, the Support Officer Learning Difficulties assessed Bill's reading and found difficulties in auditory discrimination and sequential memory, as well as vowel identification and blending. The teacher and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties developed an Individual Education Program that focussed on appropriate levelled texts and auditory processing activities. In Year 4 the Support Officer Learning Difficulties carried out further assessments that showed Bill's reading accuracy to be around the 8-year-old level. A phonics test indicated ongoing difficulties with sounds in words and Bill guessed at words, rather than analysing them accurately. In Year 5, when he was administered a miscue analysis on a home visit, Bill read with enthusiasm, his miscues indicating that he was concentrating on reading with expression at the expense of accuracy. He is now a prolific writer who can use a variety of genres, but handwriting is not well formed. Bill perceives his strengths as being, "Maths, making things, chasing

chooks, mustering and the computer." Despite his apparent difficulties in reading he does not see this as an area of weakness.

Bill is making progress with his schooling, although his home tutor still has some concerns and finds it difficult to manage his behaviour consistently, particularly in regard to the amount of work completed each day. Geographical isolation makes it difficult for the home tutor to judge expectations for Bill's year level. She has noticed the teacher's greater willingness to modify set work since the appointment of the Support Officer Learning Difficulties and has found this particularly helpful. She has also commented on the ability of the Support Officer Learning Difficulties to ensure continuity of programs from year to year.

Cathy

Cathy is 10 years old and in Year 5. She lives with her parents, approximately one and a half hour drive from the School of the Air, near an old salt mine at which both her parents work. Three older siblings live away from home. When her parents moved to their present address last year they enrolled Cathy in the School of the Air. Her mother is the home tutor. One of the rooms in the house, which has been converted into Cathy's schoolroom, also houses the mail that her mother sorts daily. Assessment by the Support Officer Learning Difficulties and the teacher showed that Cathy had difficulties in reading comprehension, writing, and the number strand in mathematics. Her reading accuracy was appropriate for her age level. Cathy's mother reported that, until this time, she had not been aware that that Cathy had any learning difficulties. After home visits by the Support Officer Learning Difficulties and the teacher, in which organisation of work was identified as being of major concern, a highly structured Individual Education Program was developed for Cathy that involved the use of motivation, a daily timetable and list of set activities for each day. A further identified major difficulty was that Cathy was frequently required to work without supervision. Towards the end of the year it was found that Cathy's organisation of her learning was haphazard. The Support Officer Learning Difficulties and the teacher therefore set up a new timetable and required Cathy to phone the teacher each day to confirm the work carried out and areas where she needed further help. This appears to have increased her interest in learning. Cathy's mother expressed concern about her capacity to take on the role of home tutor, as it was new to her. She feels that the Support Officer Learning Difficulties and the teacher have been helpful in supporting Cathy's learning and realises that she needs more supervision in her schoolwork.

Sally

Sally is 9 years of age and in Year 3. She lives with her mother, father and 3-year-old sister in a small settlement of three families that was originally founded to service the railway line. Her father, a qualified mechanical fitter, works on a nearby mine site and her mother, who has worked in an accounts department, now works on a part-time basis sorting mail. Sally's mother is her home tutor and her schoolroom is a converted bedroom. After Sally had been identified by her School of the Air teacher as having speech and language problems in her Preprimary year she repeated Preprimary. In her second Preprimary year an Individual Education Program was developed collaboratively by her speech therapist, teacher and home tutor that had a focus on receptive and expressive language development. She also had an individual weekly speech therapy lesson with her teacher on air in addition to a special program for mother to implement.

In Years 1-3 Sally's Individual Education Program was coordinated by her home tutor, School of the Air teacher, Support Officer Learning Difficulties, speech therapist, psychologist and school principal. Psychological assessment carried out in Year 1 provided the basis for Sally's program. Further testing in Year 2 showed Sally's strength as being in visual processing that did not involve verbal skills. Recommendations were

made for easier reading materials, phonics, comprehension and vocabulary development, with a focus on direct instruction. Speech therapy was continued. In Year 3, Sally's Individual Education Program has focused on set tasks appropriate to her level of development, but below that of other Year 3 students. Sally's mother/home tutor has found it difficult to accept that Sally is unable to work at her year level in language and literacy. However, Sally has made significant progress, has begun to read some books independently and to use the computer to complete independent writing assignments. She is working at a Year 3 level in mathematics.

A particular problem for Sally's mother is that Sally's learning difficulties have been associated with some behavioural difficulties. The home tutor has found the Support Officer Learning Difficulties extremely useful in helping to manage her behaviour and is excited to see the progress Sally has made over the past year.

Neville

Neville, in Year 6, is 11 years old. His family recently moved from interstate and now live on a station where his parents are involved in the provision of training for an Aboriginal community. He is moderately hearing impaired and has speech, processing and behavioural difficulties. He previously attended a mainstream school, but because of his learning difficulties his mother sought a place for him in a School of the Air. His three older brothers, who are not enrolled in the School of the Air, also have experienced difficulty in learning to read. His home tutor is his mother who has found it difficult to adapt to this role and Neville is often required to complete his schoolwork by himself. Because of his poor reading skills, he finds this very difficult. He has a room that has been designated his classroom: it contains a computer, a radio and workstation. A modified program of structured and repetitive activities has been developed to help him complete work without supervision and to overcome his reading difficulties. Previous assessment by an occupational therapist, speech therapist and psychologist suggest that he has a visual memory disorder, which inhibits his written language. His intellectual and problem solving abilities have been assessed as average for his year level and he is numerically proficient.

This year, in Year 6, Neville has been assessed as having a Year 3 reading age, with difficulties in sight word recognition, phonics, spelling and finding main ideas in text. His behaviour interferes with much of his school learning and he has not responded to a structured phonics program. He has, however, responded to a kinaesthetic approach and is using a Braille machine to learn new words. He is interested in science, mathematics and social studies. After the first home visit his teacher felt that time and behaviour management were the main issues to be dealt with and, in consultation with the Support Officer Learning Difficulties, his teacher developed an Individual Education Program that focussed on these behaviours. On a family visit to the School of the Air, the teacher and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties noticed further dimensions of Neville's home behaviours and, as an outcome of this meeting and further testing by the Support Officer Learning Difficulties, the home tutor agreed to assess and report on his behaviour on a regular basis. This has included faxing completed work to the teacher each afternoon. Neville feels that he has made progress with his learning and that the Braille machine has helped him to read, write and spell words more easily. The Individual Education Program, on which he is currently working, focuses on independent work behaviours and the use of a CD-ROM is helping him work when not supervised by the home tutor. The Support Officer Learning Difficulties has assisted the teacher in modifying Neville's educational program and dealing with his behavioural difficulties. Neville's teacher feels that the Support Officer Learning Difficulties has given him confidence when working with students, like Neville, who have learning difficulties.

Discussion

The *Mapping the Territory* report has identified many factors that may compromise the effectiveness of teaching for students with learning difficulties and that school life can be extremely arduous for these students (for a summary see Rohl, House, Loudon, Milton & Rivalland, 2000). In the present study it is evident that students with learning difficulties who are enrolled in a School of the Air have their difficulties compounded. All students with learning difficulties are faced with many school tasks that are beyond their levels of development and, in order to complete such tasks, they have to work much harder than their normally achieving classmates. In the School of the Air setting, not only do such students face tasks that are too difficult for them, but they also do not usually have their work supervised by a trained teacher, who can adjust tasks and behavioural expectations to individual needs. This can lead to frustration for both students and home tutors, as Cathy's mother points out:

I have to go out of the room. I know she can do what's in front of her and I get frustrated because she tries to say she can't do it and I know she can. That's when I walk out of the room before I start screaming at her. She will not work things out for herself. She knows it but she'll just try me in certain areas for the reaction. I'll say 'Cathy, you know what it is.' And then she'll just look at me and you can see what she's up to straight away and I've got to get out of the room.

This relationship between learning and behavioural difficulties has been shown in many research studies (see Chan & Dally, 2000). In all four cases in the present study, it was shown that managing the students' behaviour was a major challenge for the home tutors, who in all these cases were the mothers of the students. This challenge may have a major impact on the relationships between parents and children where the contexts of home and school are inseparable. For the home tutors this is an ongoing problem for which they have some support from the Support Officers Learning Difficulties. Nevertheless, the home tutors/mothers have to deal with behaviour problems on a daily basis.

Recognition of a learning difficulty by home tutors/parents, who have no previous experience of educating their own children in a School of the Air, may be difficult. However, the individual attention given to students by the School of the Air teacher (usually in consultation with the Support Officer Learning Difficulties) appears to have led to effective identification and diagnosis of learning difficulties for the four case study children. For example, Sally's language difficulties were identified by her Preprimary teacher from her on-air conversation. This led to early assessment by a speech therapist and many follow-up assessments. Further, it appears that Cathy's difficulties were not identified in a mainstream primary classroom, whereas once she was enrolled in a School of the Air these difficulties were readily noticed.

Despite early identification by School of the Air personnel, some parents find it hard to accept the fact that their child has a learning difficulty. Moreover, some children's difficulties will be severe and ongoing and will require additional support throughout their school years. Acceptance of severe and ongoing difficulties and the long-term commitment required of parents to the student's education, place exceptional demands on families. Family circumstances may prevent some parents from making this commitment to the home tutor role. For example two case study children were in situations that required them to work with little supervision from the home tutor. Whilst the Support Officer Learning Difficulties recognised the children's individual needs and developed some management techniques for these children, it was evident that more support was needed. Children with learning difficulties often have short attention spans and need very close supervision in order to make appropriate progress. Where parents are not able to

devote themselves to the role of home tutor, students with learning difficulties are at extreme risk.

The data suggest that the Support Officer Learning Difficulties has provided important support and development for the School of the Air. This is evident at every level of data collection. The students and home tutors have found the extra support provided for their specific needs invaluable. The home tutors appear to be more confident in dealing with the difficulties confronting their children. The support provided by the Support Officer Learning Difficulties to families, when they have visited the School of the Air or when the Support Officer Learning Difficulties has accompanied the teachers on home visits, has been perceived by students and home tutors as useful. The teachers perceive that the Support Officer Learning Difficulties has given them confidence in the assessment of students, selection of teaching strategies, modification of set materials and the writing of Individual Education Programs, with the result that children have experienced success and reported feeling more positive about their schoolwork. The School of the Air principal perceives that the Support Officer Learning Difficulties is an excellent resource, who provides continuity of support and has facilitated access to allied services. He believes that the collaborative model adopted by the Centre for Inclusive Schooling is of benefit to all stakeholders:

The SOLD is a huge benefit to have as a resource. So the parents have now got a psychological, educational support services resource all wrapped up in one person, who is quite willing to go out and see them on the basis of a phone call. You take that away from isolated people and then the classroom teacher has got to go and try and be a SOLD. A SOLD should be able to write themselves out of a job by helping teachers to be able to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties. But I think just having that person not in a teaching role is always going to be essential. It's the missing link between students, teachers, parents, principals, and District Office.

Issues and Recommendations

Learning difficulties has long been seen as a specialist area of education. The literature review developed for the *Mapping the Territory* report examined over four hundred specialist documents. Nationally and internationally there are journals devoted entirely to the topic of learning difficulties/disabilities, for example *The Journal of Learning Disabilities* and *The Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*. In the *Mapping the Territory* report attention is drawn to the complexity of the area and the need for well-trained (often through postgraduate university qualifications), highly skilled and effective teachers who have access to ongoing professional development so that they can provide appropriate support for students who have difficulty in learning.

This means that the initial training of any new Support Officers Learning Difficulties needs to be of the same high quality as that given to the first group trained. Further, it seems that training would be particularly beneficial if it were spaced learning and of longer duration. The content and processes of the training program need to be well documented and evaluated to ensure quality control. Given the need for the Support Officers Learning Difficulties to support home tutors in the area of behaviour management in the home/school context, this needs to be an important aspect of the training. Once Support Officers Learning Difficulties have been trained there needs to be a planned program of ongoing professional development so that they can keep up with advances in the area and build on their accumulated experiences. It would seem appropriate for their training to be recognised as part of a university qualification in the area of learning difficulties.

A related issue is that of training for School of the Air personnel, including the Support Officers Learning Difficulties, in the use of technology. The radio has traditionally been

the primary medium of communication between students and teachers in Schools of the Air. Teachers in the School of the Air in this study were also using faxes and email to give immediate feedback to some of their students, which is most important for students with learning difficulties (Chan & Dally, 2000) and one student was using a CD-ROM on his computer. There is great potential for computer technology to assist students with learning difficulties (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998) but its potential has not yet been realised, particularly for students in remote and rural areas. Whilst the School of Isolated and Distance Education is making advances in this area, distance education materials remain largely print-based and students still use the postal system to mail much of their completed work. There are of course basic technical problems for some rural and remote families in that they have limited access to power supplies. Nevertheless, it seems most important that, where feasible, more use is made of computers in distance education and that School of the Air personnel are familiar with and able to use a wide range of technological tools, including computer software. It also seems important that distance education materials, where possible, are provided in electronic formats for those students who have regular access to the internet.

Given the remote location of the Schools of the Air and the high quality of the personnel recruited for the position of Support Officer Learning Difficulties, it is not surprising that all but one of the original Support Officers Learning Difficulties have now moved to other positions. Transience of staff will be an ongoing problem. Accordingly it seems that long-term maintenance of the trial model will need to offer the training to a larger group of teachers. The advantages would be twofold in that there would be a larger pool of teachers with Support Officer Learning Difficulties training, who would be available to take up positions when needed. There would also be an increase in the overall number of classroom teachers who have refined knowledge and skills to support students with learning difficulties in regular school settings.

Both teachers and home tutors indicated that they have found the Support Officer Learning Difficulties to be an excellent resource who has provided them with knowledge and skills in working with students with learning difficulties. It seems that there is great potential for this upskilling to be further developed. For the teachers, this could lead to a more systematic program of professional development that builds on their work with individual children. It is particularly important, for example, that teachers are able to identify children who may be at risk of developing learning difficulties as early as possible, know how to plan, implement and evaluate Individual Education Programs and to modify the program to meet the needs of individual students with learning difficulties.

For the home tutors, upskilling by the Support Officer Learning Difficulties is dependent on their capacity to take up what is offered, particularly in terms of time and motivation. In the final analysis it is the interface between the home tutor and the student that largely determines educational outcomes for students enrolled in a School of the Air. There thus appears to be a need for the development of training packages for home tutors working with students with learning difficulties.

The Support Officer Learning Difficulties in this study has been able to coordinate services from a variety of agencies for children with learning difficulties. However, for some parents in particular locations it can be difficult and time consuming to access certain services that are not available in their immediate vicinity. Previously when parents and students were able to attend the Chidley Education Centre in Perth these services were all available in the city. For students with severe and/or multiple needs it seems that a central facility that provides a range of education, health, welfare and allied services would make access to these services much easier for families. Furthermore, such a facility could also be accessed by those children in remote and rural areas who are not enrolled in a School of the Air.

A further issue is access to the Support Officers Learning Difficulties themselves. Officially the Support Officers Learning Difficulties are only available to work with teachers and home tutors in their own School of the Air, and are not available for students who are enrolled in other remote or isolated schools, unless there is a clause allowing this in the negotiated service agreement between the School of the Air and the Centre for Inclusive Schooling.

Finally, the apparent success of the appointment of the Support Officer Learning Difficulties to the School of the Air in this study suggests that schools in both urban and rural locations could benefit from access to a trained Support Officer Learning Difficulties. Results of the national survey of schools (Rohl, Milton & Brady, 2000), carried out for the *Mapping the Territory* study, suggested that a large proportion of schools in WA may not have access to specialist teachers trained in the area of Learning Difficulties. Thus, the use of system and/or sector funding to extend the Support Officer Learning Difficulties's program to allow wider access for teachers and students to trained specialist teachers in this area appears to be fully justified.

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Sylvia Byers

Principal of Chidley Educational Centre

Sylvia Byers is a committed educator who has recently retired from working for the Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA). Just prior to Sylvia retiring she was Principal of the Chidley Educational Centre, a school based in Perth which provided a service for students from remote and rural educational settings who were identified by their schools as having severe learning difficulties. Sylvia's employment with EDWA spans a period of approximately forty-five years and a significant part of that time was spent teaching in mainstream classes. However, Sylvia developed an interest in working with students who had learning difficulties, and it was with this aspect of teaching that she was engaged for many years.

Working with students with learning difficulties

Working with students with learning difficulties, both within the context of mainstream classrooms and in withdrawal situations, has given Sylvia the opportunity to experience the advantages and disadvantages of each model. In one instance she was required to travel between three schools each day to withdraw students and she found that it was difficult to maintain effective communication with the student's classroom teacher and the parents involved in each case. However, working in this way allowed Sylvia to learn a lot about in-depth assessment and the diagnostic needs of students and she has come to understand that in some circumstances withdrawal can disadvantage students if an individual's particular academic needs are not met and the teacher and parents remained uninvolved.

There has been a range of recurring issues to do with the management of students with learning difficulties that Sylvia has encountered many times in her career. Early on in her work Sylvia noticed that the assistance mainstream teachers wanted was often centred around the identification of learning difficulties and confirmation that a program developed was appropriate to student needs.

They used to ask the question, 'What's wrong with this kid?' So we would look at what the student's needs were and what we were asking the child to do and take it from there. And I found that really, really exciting because you encouraged a teacher to try the simplest thing first rather than look at something complex. Simple skills like making sure that the child was focusing or attending before you started to teach and did they have the pre-requisite skill to achieve what was being asked of them. Those sorts of things, which were not complicated. They would begin to see the child progress and the child and the parent would see it and so on.

Many teachers gathered a lot of information from testing and while some could use diagnostic and assessment tools to provide useful information about student learning, creating an appropriate plan from the information

Issue:
Programs provided need to focus on student needs.

Issue:
Primary stakeholders involved in a child's learning include the student, parent, teacher, and school administration.

Issue:
Teachers need to be able to

gathered was often problematic. Frequently when a plan was devised teachers were faced with the difficulty of implementing an individual education plan within a group of thirty or forty students.

In the process of assisting teachers to develop teaching plans, early identification of student's difficulties was seen as a key factor. And being able to identify kids as early as possible is not always easy. Often it is the student with the most inappropriate interactive behaviours that is most readily identified. But then what do you do to intervene and then how do you monitor and evaluate what you do? This is a cyclical process.

Sylvia also understands the need for teachers to work in partnership with parents to resolve student's learning difficulties. Establishing a clear line of communication with parents is essential to the process of collaboration. Listening to parents, keeping a record of the information that they share about their children and knowing which questions need to be asked of them are skills that Sylvia perceives teachers need to have if they wish to effect positive outcomes for students. It is important for key stakeholders to share information so that the students needs are met in a cohesive way.

The importance of early intervention is not to be underestimated and Sylvia acknowledges that this is the most expedient way to work with student learning difficulties but she is concerned for the underachievers at all levels in our education system.

If a student is having difficulties, no matter their age, then that needs to be addressed and in a way the student is not going to feel singled out or made to feel different and that's not always easy when they get to high school.

The Chidley Educational Centre

The Chidley Educational Centre was established in 1976 as a residential facility for primary age students with learning difficulties who live in isolated areas of Western Australia. The centre targeted students with an average IQ who were at least two years behind chronological age in reading. It provided a facility comparable to the remedial centres that operated on a student withdrawal model throughout the metropolitan area in the 1970s.

In the mid 1980s developments in educational theory led to significant changes in Education Department philosophy and policy. Contemporary theory emphasised the importance of inclusion and the long-term benefits of empowering teachers/ home tutors to address the needs of individual students.

These changes saw remedial centres phased out and

access professional development in assessment techniques and the development of education programs for students experiencing learning difficulties.

Issue: Early identification and appropriate intervention is key to successful learning for students experiencing learning difficulties.

Issue: Programs developed for students need to be well coordinated.

Issue: It is vital that teachers and parents develop a good rapport, especially in the SOTA context.

Education Support Centres established. Students previously withdrawn to remedial centres remained the responsibility of the mainstream classroom teachers who were supported on site by the Education Support Centre personnel.

Throughout this transition Chidley continued to operate from the philosophy of the 1970's providing a remedial service on a withdrawal basis.

In 1993 Chidley began to implement changes that reflected current policy, shifting services, and support from the student towards the teacher/ home tutor.

The 1998/9 New Model Trial resulted from the joint efforts of the Isolated Children's Parent's Association and the Education Department of Western Australia. The new model of service was developed after considerable consultation with all stakeholders and resulted in the Chidley Educational Centre becoming non-operational while the new model was trialed.

This trial focuses on empowering teachers to make a difference for students, recognising individual student needs supporting the Education Departments current philosophy and policy for the provision of services and support as close as possible to the point of need.

Extract taken from the *Information Kit, Expression of Interest* document written in 1999 by the Centre for Inclusive Schooling branch of EDWA and provided to teachers interested in working as Support Officers Learning Difficulties

Students coming to Perth to live-in at Chidley stayed for a period of up to nine months so that teachers could assess their academic needs and also set up any specialist assessments needed to begin a program of intervention. Prior to Chidley closing Sylvia felt that they had developed an almost ideal situation for providing for students with learning difficulties who came from rural or remote situations.

Students usually attended Chidley when the school or district resources had been exhausted and the student required more than academic assessment. Usually the kids that came away were the ones that needed in-depth academic assessment, speech pathology assessment, occupational therapy or clinical psychology and the parents were loath to go to clinical psychologists in a small country town.

The original model that Chidley had operated was focused on student withdrawal and in the latter nine months of operation the focus at Chidley changed to a home, school and teacher focus, which emphasised the upskilling of teachers and parents. Consequently, at this time two programs were operating at Chidley. The first provided students with a one- to two-week diagnostic assessment, where parents accompanied their children and lived in. The second continued to provide withdrawal for those students who needed a teaching intervention program, which might involve the services of allied professionals.

Issue:

The ability of the New Chidley Model to replicate the availability of these services in such a coordinated fashion is yet to be seen.

Referrals to Chidley were primarily through the school or District Education Office and if parents made inquiries directly to Chidley they would be guided back to the parent/ school/ District Office referral process. This ensured that the primary stakeholders were involved in the case from the outset and that they were able to ascertain the needs of the student and make appropriate referrals. Successful referrals required parents to accompany their child to Chidley for assessment purposes and they remained there for the duration of that assessment. Parent involvement was requisite and no more than eight students and their parents or families would live-in at Chidley at any one time. Of these, a small group could be accepted for the residential withdrawal program, which would last for no longer than a school term.

So it was really working towards an individualised plan for that student. It was interesting because when I reflect I think that it was often a joint venture between key service providers - at least Health and Education.

Even though there was a health team available from Princess Margaret Hospital that would go out to the smaller town centres, it was often difficult for some of the isolated families to be able to get into a centre. Often a teacher from Chidley could work with a teacher in a student's home school to complete an academic assessment by phone and it would only be when there was further specialist assessment needed that a student and their family would go to Chidley in Perth. When a student returned to their school after working at Chidley follow-up support would also be provided.

A range of specialists and educators were able to observe students for twenty-four hours a day over a minimum period of three months. The student profiles that were then compiled and the programs that were developed as a consequence were seen to be invaluable. Sylvia expresses some concern that the kind of specialist attention that Chidley was able to offer is no longer so readily available to the parents of students at risk.

I guess that's something that we are going to have to be aware of in the future that has never really been put to the test. A School of the Air parent has not sought that sort of service to date and I feel that's almost clouded the need for such a service because there's this perception of we're okay now, we've got everything we need because we've got these Support Officers Learning Difficulties. The new system has yet to be 'tried' and I'm just concerned that some kids may not be getting what they need and further needs may not be being identified that could and should be.

For some students attending Chidley meant that they could be given a new start at school. A stay at Chidley provided them with the opportunity to resolve learning difficulties and inappropriate behaviours, and develop the self-esteem needed to sustain further learning.

Chidley's services needed to ensure that not only did the students see themselves as worthwhile people but also work had to be done to change the way the student was perceived at his home school. For some, however, it was worthwhile considering a change of school within a town to provide a 'new start' and in a very few cases repeating a year level was

a considered option. This helped some of the kids that needed more time and were not socially well adjusted.

Sylvia observes that even though a great amount of work was done with the parents and the students the model would have been even more effective had it included even greater collaboration with the student's home school teacher.

At a systems level Sylvia has seen a range of different forms of support being offered to schools to assist students with learning difficulties. There have been periods when systemic support has been available to schools for the withdrawal of students and periods when schools have had to take full responsibility for effecting positive outcomes for students at risk with little or no offer of systemic support to the school.

Sylvia also feels that support to the parents of students with learning difficulties is lacking. She sees that many parents want to help their child and they will do what they can but often it is difficult for them to implement programs in the home and they need some support to do so.

Despite parents working in partnership with the school, the difficulties that they have in managing their child's behaviour is sometimes overwhelming. There needs to be a cohesive approach to working with the home and other stakeholders.

One of the reasons that Chidley was established in the 1970s was to provide a service to students in rural and remote areas, as it was perceived these services were lacking. Sylvia believes that one of the reasons they were able to achieve outcomes for students at Chidley that were not always achievable in the rural and remote areas, was that Chidley provided an avenue for a holistic approach and could facilitate the co-operation of parents, Education, Health, Family and Children's Services, Police, and other service providers.

It was brilliant when it worked cohesively. District Office played a key role as they ultimately took on the role of assisting the schools. It worked best when District Office support was consistent.

I believe that the way in which Chidley operated prior to it closing to implement the SOLD model was almost ideal. Perfection would be a SOLD in District Offices and Schools of the Air as well as the provision of services to the very few requiring a multi-service approach who don't have assistance of this kind available to them.

The Chidley New Model

The Chidley New Model was set up as the result of a submission from the Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA) which sought to redress the perceived gap in the service provision for students with learning difficulties in isolated and rural areas of Western Australia. Where metropolitan schools had access to services to support their students, schools catering for isolated and rural areas had no such support. EDWA, in consultation with the ICPA, wanted to provide a service that was seen to be cost-effective and able to cater for greater

Issue:
Resourcing at a systems level needs to be consistent to provide for students' learning needs.

Issue:
Often parents do not have the professional background required to adequately support students who have learning difficulties.

Issue:
The equitable provision of support services to metropolitan and remote rural areas is an on-going

numbers of students than were being catered for by the old Chidley model.

It was interesting because Chidley was set up and opened in 1976 when there was little provision for country students who had learning difficulties. In the city some provision had been made for this group of students. The tables had actually turned in the 90s when some city people were saying, 'How come there is the Chidley Centre for country kids yet we can't access it?' So we really needed to look at the service provision for all kids who were experiencing difficulties with learning for whatever reason.

Sylvia also felt that many families in rural and remote areas did not want primary aged students to be living away from home. And so it became important to provide specialist services closer to the home school in which the child and the teacher were working. Consequently, the New Model was trialed to provide a better service to a greater number of students and parents were promised a service as good as, if not better than the service provided by Chidley.

The provision of such a service to all students in rural and remote situations was to be through two linked approaches. The first required the appointment of Support Officers Learning Difficulties in towns where there were Schools of the Air. The second saw Support Officers Learning Difficulties appointed to the District Service Centre (often referred to as Hale House and now the Centre for Inclusive Schooling). These two groups were to provide a statewide service through District Offices.

Although still Principal of Chidley, Sylvia worked as Consulting Principal for the District Service Centre and this required her to work with School of the Air Principals to coordinate the change of these services at a systems level. Sylvia co-ordinated the roles of the Support Officers Learning Difficulties into the Schools of the Air and the District Offices, ensured that the links to School of Isolated and Distance Education and the ICPA were maintained, and fostered the collaboration between stakeholders. It was not until this process was begun that the ICPA expressed concern about service provision for students of their membership in non-School of the Air schools.

So it was really important that, at systems level, a genuine attempt was made to provide for all students who experienced difficulties with learning. One group is identified as the SOLDs for the School of the Air. The second group had a brief to work with district personnel who in turn would support schools. The key factor was to skill District Office staff to provide assistance to schools to work with students experiencing difficulties with learning.

problem for WA service providers.

Issue:
The provision of a range of services to the home learning environment in remote areas is not always possible.

The training

The training program that the Support Officers Learning Difficulties underwent was researched and devised by Dorothy Outtrim, a teacher and facilitator who had been contracted to work at Chidley. The professional development designed was based on current relevant

literature as well as in keeping with EDWA policy. Sylvia describes the training as a process that included acknowledging the expertise of teachers involved and creating a safe environment in which they could challenge previously held assumptions and develop their understandings of students learning.

True self-development. And it worked on a non-expert model. They developed expertise for a collaborative problem-solving model. They were immersed in that process and were to operate in that way in the field.

The Support Officers Learning Difficulties were trained in the use of a range of assessment tools that would be useful in the identification of student learning difficulties. These included criterion reference testing, the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability, and the Builder Reading Assessment Technique. Informal processes such as reading retells and probes were used in conjunction with information taken from students' written work and an analysis of anecdotal evidence was used to assess areas of strength and of need.

As the training of the Support Officers Learning Difficulties progressed, Dorothy and Sylvia were able to assess each of the Support Officers Learning Difficulties so that when their training was complete Sylvia was able to support them in their new roles. The Support Officers Learning Difficulties were initially employed for a three-year period in each of the Schools of the Air to provide support to the teachers and Home Tutors of students experiencing difficulties with learning.

Upon reflection Sylvia would like to see some modifications to the time frame in which the training was implemented. She feels that the four-month period within which they had to work, from the closing of Chidley to the implementation of the New Chidley Model, was restrictive. A possible framework for future training might include a two- to three-week block of training, followed by some time spent in the Support Officer Learning Difficulties role at a school, with a final week of training to complete the course. Similarly, a trainer working alongside the Support Officer Learning Difficulties or someone at her side for a period would also be useful. Sylvia still considers that the five-week period of training is necessary to allow for the development of the Support Officer Learning Difficulties' confidence in their own ability to work towards changing the attitudes of others. They also need to be able to assist teachers to extend their skills to positively effect learning outcomes for those students who have learning difficulties.

You need to have a firm belief that you can make a difference for kids with learning difficulties, and that these kids can learn. It is a belief that anyone and everyone can learn. It's one thing for teachers to acquire knowledge and use it themselves but it's another skill to assist others to enhance the skills they already have.

Issue:

Further practice in the field would enhance the SOLD's training program.

Issue:

The original training program needs to be offered to all new SOLDs.

The recruitment

The recruitment of the Support Officers Learning Difficulties into the training program and eventually to positions at each of the Schools of the Air presented an initial dilemma for Sylvia. To attract experienced

teachers to work in Public Service positions in remote country areas was not an easy task.

How do you get teachers who are at the top of the teaching salary scale, who might even be a Level 3, who have X number of weeks holiday a year and set hours, even though we know they work more than those hours at the school, to apply for a job with Public Service conditions and go to places like Meekatharra!

Issue:
Conditions of employment for SOLDs may need some revision.

Initial advertisements calling for expressions of interest from teachers for the Support Teacher Learning Difficulties position were placed in the EDWA publication, *School Matters* in March of 1998. Five School of the Air Support Officers Learning Difficulties were appointed at this time and trained by Dorothy Outtrim and Sylvia. A further five Support Officers Learning Difficulties were trained by Grant Wheatley at the District Service Centre (Centre for Inclusive Schooling) to form the Perth team.

The Support Officer Learning Difficulties position at the Meekatharra School of the Air proved the hardest to fill. Initially a Support Officer Learning Difficulties attached to the Centre for Inclusive Schooling was flown there weekly and when this arrangement became difficult to sustain Sylvia took on the position whilst maintaining her Consulting Principal role. From April 1999 until the November of that year she would fly to Meekatharra to work as a Support Officer Learning Difficulties for a week and then return to Perth to work as a Consulting Principal for the following week.

In May of 1999 Sylvia began to organise further advertisements for the Support Officer Learning Difficulties positions and she worked with marketing personnel to develop these. Advertisements for Support Officers Learning Difficulties to be appointed to Schools of the Air were then placed in *The West Australian* and over 140 responses were received from teachers inquiring about the training. It was from this pool of interested teachers that the Support Officer Learning Difficulties position at the Meekatharra School of the Air was filled later in 1999.

Issue:
Difficult-to-staff areas may require different staffing models and employment conditions.

Teachers responding to the Support Officer Learning Difficulties advertisements in *The West Australian* were invited to attend one of two week-long courses organised by Sylvia over the school holiday period. These preliminary courses provided teachers with an opportunity to learn how to use assessment tools such as the Builder Reading Assessment Technique and the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability in conjunction with an actual case study that they had been working on in their schools. This gave the applicants a preview into of the kinds of tasks that they would be expected to carry out as Support Officers Learning Difficulties and also contributed to the work that they were already doing with students in their existing schools.

The SOLDs delivered the content but the planning was done collaboratively. This gave all of us an opportunity to provide peer feedback and support. Teachers from EDWA and private schools enrolled. Carnarvon was staffed as a result of the course and drawing on this pool of people, we were able to fill other vacancies.

The teachers applying for the position of Support Officer Learning Difficulties possessed a wide range of levels of knowledge in the area of literacy or learning difficulties. As the advertisements for the positions needed to be generically presented the criteria that became the focus for selection were to do with the applicant's ability to be adaptable and flexible, and display a capacity for problem solving. Sylvia's belief was that if the Support Officers Learning Difficulties came with the belief that all students have the potential to learn then they could acquire the skills needed to teach others and to work collaboratively in the Support Officer Learning Difficulties position.

Issue:
The belief that all students have the capacity to learn is fundamental to the success of the work done by teachers and SOLDs.

As a SOLD you don't need to know all the strategies but you do need to know how to use a problem solving approach so that teachers, parents and students can be assisted in the best way possible. The people that you are working with will often come up with solutions. But they (the SOLDs) don't have to have all the answers because if they do then that would defeat the purpose of the New Chidley Model which is to ensure that students, teachers and parents are all involved.

Some observations

At Chidley there was a holistic approach to the strategy of working with students with learning difficulties, where a range of specialist services was available to families in remote situations. Sylvia has noticed how expensive and time consuming it has become for parents in a remote locality to access all of the services that they might need.

Issue:
Access to allied services outside of those provided by SOTA/EDWA is still an issue for families in remote situations.

I had all of these experiences in a small country town, where one particular student had severe learning difficulties and demonstrated inappropriate behaviour. The family lived on a station quite a distance out from the town and the student required academic assessment as well as assessment from a clinical psychologist and a speech pathologist. In order to access these services he had to travel to [three different locations, hundreds of kilometres apart]. A teacher and SOLD from the SOTA that the student was enrolled in visited the student, staff from the District Office was involved, and a psychologist from SIDE was accessed for over twelve months. The time taken to initiate and implement services for that student probably exacerbated the problem. Whereas the referral to a Chidley-like service would have got this together in several months and facilitated the establishment of on-going services.

Issue:
On-going systemic support for SOLDs needs to be maintained so that they can also sustain their support networks.

Sylvia also feels that for some people living in remote situations it is very difficult to meet the needs of children requiring the support of specialist services. Not only are there differences in the struggle that parents have to meet the educational needs of their children but also in their ability to access the specialist services that may be necessary to support them to do so. Sylvia believes that the support for Support Officers Learning Difficulties in the Schools of the Air will need to be maintained to ensure a quality service.

Issue:
New SOLDs need to receive the same kind of training that the original SOLDs received.

Dorothy Outtrim

Developer and Facilitator of Support Officers Learning Difficulties Training.

For over thirty years Dorothy Outtrim has worked with the Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA) as teacher, principal, School Development Officer, Program Leader and Consultant. The positions that she has held over this period of time reflect her keen interest in the area of Learning Difficulties and include:

- working with the District Remedial Centre in the Darling Range area;
- holding a position as an Education Support Principal in Kalamunda;
- working as a School Development Officer of Learning Difficulties within a Student Services team;
- developing and trialing a Learning Difficulties program;
- working as the Leader of a Learning Difficulties program attached to Student services;
- initiating a mentor program at Chidley;
- developing Support Officer/Learning Difficulties (SOLD) positions and inducting teachers into these positions;
- and working as a consultant to provide a range of professional development for Departmental sections, schools and parents.

It was while Dorothy was working with Sylvia Byers at Chidley during the mid-nineties that her involvement with the development of the New Chidley Model began. Specifically, Dorothy's role required that she research and develop the training program for the Support Officers Learning Difficulties and to do this she needed to analyse data and information gathered from various sources. She was also required to collaborate with Sylvia Byers to look at and critically appraise different models of support for students with learning difficulties in isolated situations and to initiate and trial a mentoring program for use with Chidley personnel.

Issue:
Provision of services to remote and rural locations.

The Development of a Training Program

Issues and Influences

The intention of the New Chidley Model developed in 1998, was to try and bring the service that was being offered to students in remote and rural areas in line with the District supported model. In conjunction with this, a review of the withdrawal system at Chidley, which had been in place since the seventies, found that it still retained an amount of the

Issue:
Perceived shortcomings of withdrawal model.

seventy's influence.

Other aspects of the model of support that Chidley provided replicated the concept of the withdrawal model. Students were travelling to Chidley to receive help with their learning and were returning home without any change occurring in the home learning environments to support them.

We know that there were problems with that because the environment often stayed the same. So whilst Chidley was doing some quite magnificent things and they had outstanding teachers there, the actual home (learning) environment wasn't changing. There was no in-depth skilling in the area of learning difficulties for those people in remote and rural areas and that was a critical point about what we were doing. Consequently the New Chidley Model was designed to place ownership with Schools of the Air rather than with Chidley.

At about the same time diagnosis of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) seemed to be increasing in Western Australia and there appeared to be a perception developing amongst classroom teachers that there needed to be a special program for students with ADHD. It soon became obvious that similar requests could be made for many other learning difficulties as they were identified. As EDWA had few resources available to allocate to the development of special programs for special groups it seemed appropriate to develop the existing skills of teachers in the area of learning difficulties and this is what Dorothy Outtrim and Sylvia Byers did.

Issue:
Teachers relying on external agencies for support for students with learning difficulties.

In 1993 Sylvia accessed a grant to begin working on some professional development for teachers and as head of the project she was able to employ Dorothy to develop the program. When this professional development was completed Martin Exell, a clinical psychologist, was employed to observe the delivery of the professional development and articulate the key aspects of successful and less successful practice. From these observations the group was able to observe that certain ways of presenting professional development were more effective than others. A trial group of teachers from schools in the Joondalup and Balga Districts were then presented with the same professional development and further analyses were carried out. The information gathered from this work was compiled by Sylvia and developed into a program of development for the staff at Chidley.

In 1997, Dorothy was employed by Sylvia to work at Chidley and part of her role was to observe teachers in their work. It was here that Dorothy developed the concept of the mentoring program, which was designed to help the teachers recognize the skills they possessed, and identify areas of strength and areas of perceived need in their teaching practice. The amount of work that was done with the teachers to identify their strengths facilitated work in the areas of need.

Then there was no animosity, it was just, 'Yes, I need to do something about this and what do you think I can do?' So I worked with them to help them look at some of alternatives that they could use. I worked with most of the teachers and helped them identify their strengths. In some instances I helped them move towards what job they could do once they

left Chidley. A considerable number of the staff had been at Chidley for many years and they were passionate and cared deeply about what went on at Chidley. So giving that up was like a grief. But it was necessary for them to move on. And most of them made that change, not without tears and stress, I've got to be honest, but most of them started to move through the change process. But I learnt a lot from that myself. So all these things, as we learn, improve what we do and I learnt some valuable things from them.

The mentoring process that Dorothy used was developed from a combination of programs found in Western Australia and New Zealand. Some of the departments within the Public Service in Western Australia utilise a mentoring program to support staff relocation and development. Similarly, the Education Department in New Zealand has implemented a mentoring process for teachers. Dorothy analysed both of these programs and was able to extract the process that was common to both of them, which she then adapted and modified to implement with the staff of the Chidley Education Centre and for the training for the New Chidley model.

The first key skill that Dorothy identified in the mentoring process was the setting up of some degree of rapport between participant and facilitator. This is an uncomplicated and natural part of every day interaction, which she sees as fundamental to genuine participant involvement in the mentoring process.

Establishing rapport is something that everyone talks about, but it's often not easy to do. So how do you do it? In setting up, how can we establish rapport? How can I walk into a room and work with a group of people and establish rapport? What does it mean to do that? What is it that I have to do to get them going? We talk an awful lot initially. We feel our way with each other. We establish some sort of common territory, and that helps establish an environment where change can occur.

The next step required that participants identify their skills. This can be more difficult than it initially appears, as most people are unwilling to talk about themselves. A participant's first response may provide some surface level identification of skills, but it is beyond this that a deeper and much more truthful discussion lies. Dorothy also discovered that this deeper level of discussion about participant strength needs to occur before any significant work can be completed on their perceived needs.

Now I did that with the guys in the professional development and that was one of their introductory exercises, so immediately I knew their strengths. Another part of the exercise was for them to identify an area of need, which gives me information about issues and skills I may need to address.

This part of the mentoring process relies on the participant's trust and reinforces the need for good rapport. It is also an important part of the problem solving process that underpins the Support Officer Learning Difficulties training program.

A Review of the Literature

In developing a program of training for the Support Officers Learning Difficulties it was important for Dorothy to access relevant literature and research. As she was looking to produce professional development for people working in the rural and isolated areas of Western Australia it became necessary for Dorothy to access studies relevant to this situation. Consequently she looked to a report, completed by Judith Rivalland and Bill Loudon for DEET in 1995, entitled *Literacy at a Distance*. This report surveyed literacy and learning in the Western Australian Schools of the Air and Distance Education contexts and provided Dorothy with some idea of the perceptions held by parents with regard to the provision of education in the 'bush'.

Since Dorothy's work with the Support Officers Learning Difficulties would necessitate the establishment of a team she looked to the literature to provide further understanding of this. She was able to access articles written by Howell with regard to Teacher Assistance Teams that he had established.

One of the key points that Howell made was that if you put somebody in a team that's perceived as having authority, for instance a psych or a deputy principal, or anyone like that where the group's perception is that they are in position of authority, everyone in the team defers to that person. Now that's significant. So it was really important that there wasn't that authority figure anywhere in the team.

Other areas of research that Dorothy reviewed were to do with collaboration and, in particular, parents as collaborative partners and the relationship between parents and teachers. She also looked at a number of problem solving processes and accessed literature relating to ADHD as this was, she thought, a major factor with some students from remote and rural areas.

Over a long period of time Chidley had been servicing students with learning difficulties from remote locations and providing support to their families. The records that the staff had been maintained became a source of valuable local information, which contributed to the description of learning difficulties in the rural Western Australian context. With permission Dorothy was able to access teachers anecdotal records and student records to determine any common threads or issues that might run through them.

Information was also accessed from the Isolated Children's Parents' Association and Dorothy began to identify some common concerns and issues that the ICPA seemed to be repeatedly raising. These were to do with perceptions of isolation and distance, the supposition that the teachers who were sent to isolated and remote postings were inexperienced, and the notion that people that had not been in isolated or remote situations would be unable to understand what was occurring there.

So that tended to support the concept for taking teachers with expertise from the city and re-locating the positions to remote and rural Schools of the Air. Suddenly you've got

Issue:

Perceptions held by the rural community regarding the standard of education delivered to their children was of concern to EDWA.

Issue:

A non-expert model, which included collaboration with parents and teachers, using a problem-solving process was preferred.

Issue:

ICPA concerns reflected rural community: perceived to be isolated from services; teachers were usually inexperienced graduates; administrators operating from

really experienced people out there, you've got people who are in the same environment. So the isolation factor is starting to be diminished, and the inexperience factor has been diminished and we do understand how it is, because we're in this environment with you. We're experiencing the same lack of power you're experiencing. Some of the issues might have only seemed to be on the surface, perhaps minor, but they have had tremendous impact. The generator goes down, or it's mustering, or your boy is more interested in helping Dad out on the station than he is in coming in to lessons and it's a battle of wills. It's often these factors that people tend not to talk about.

a central position lacked understanding of the rural situation.

Another very important factor for parents living with their children in an isolated situation has to do with the task of teaching a child that they have a strong emotional attachment to. The parent/teacher bond makes parents very aware of the way in which the learning process affects their child at an emotional level. This is intensified when students sustain learning difficulties. Learning to teach and to cope with a child's particular learning difficulties is a hard task.

Issue:
Parents working as teachers often find it difficult to detach from the close emotional relationship they have with their children.

When do I stop being a teacher and start being a parent? How do I cope with these sets of work? And because they are the parent/teacher to some degree they are also very, very aware of the emotional problems the kids might have been having in the learning process. Whereas I think teachers and parents in city schools are not aware. Those kids are in a class of 30, these kids aren't. They get their social interaction when they go on camp, but there's not that spin-off of daily social interaction. As a parent you may not be able to put things into quite the same perspective.

The personal and emotional issues relating to the parent/teacher role highlighted the need for parents to be heard and for the Education Department to be seen to be listening and responding to them. As a consequence the training that Dorothy developed was designed to resolve these particular issues.

Issue:
Parents' ability to provide adequate support to those students who have learning difficulties.

Another source of information for Dorothy were the observations collected from the trials to do with professional development that had been completed in the Joondalup and Balga Districts in 1994. The concept of the *Interactive Triangle* was developed from Martin Exell's analysis of the work that Sylvia and Dorothy did in these trials. This triangle became a guide for the implementation of successful teaching and training practice and held that for successful teaching and training to occur certain intrinsic and extrinsic conditions needed to be met by the participants and the system within which they were working.

The Interactive Triangle was developed as a way to represent the relationship between factors that affect successful teaching and training practice (See Figure 3). The 'I' stands for Interaction and this aspect of the triangle refers to the way in which a teacher and student interact with one another, which is linked to attitude, perception, and communication.

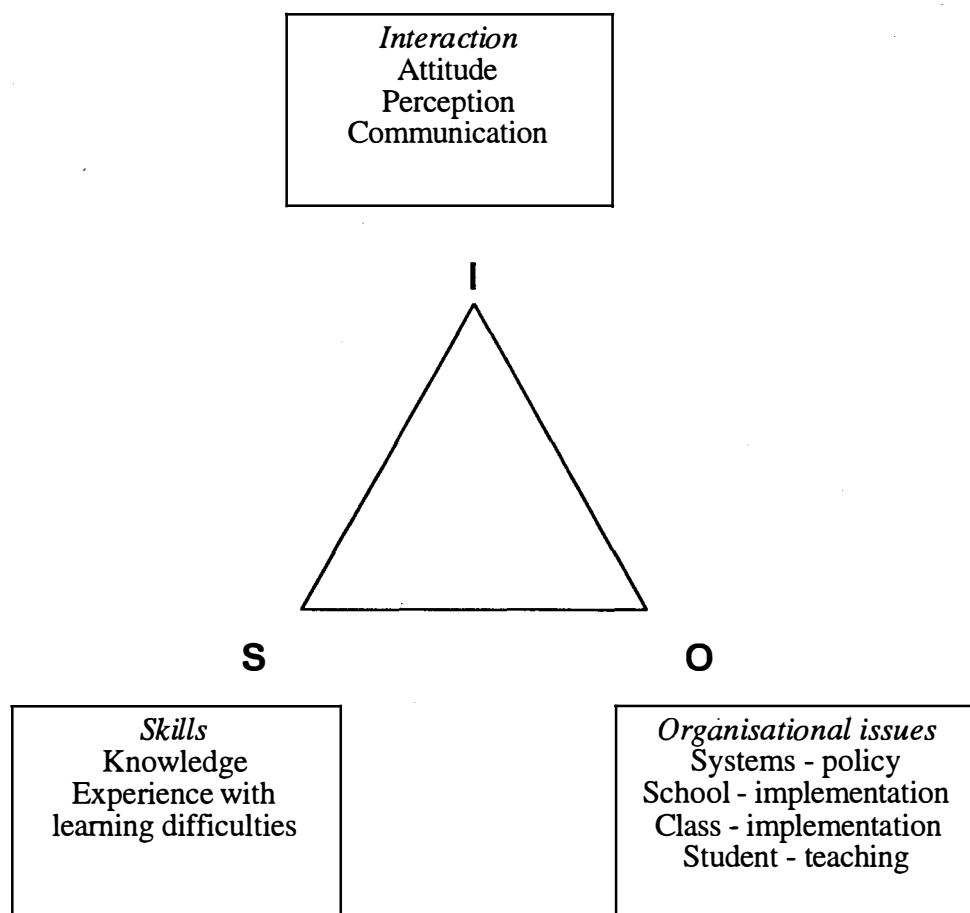
Our perception of the child actually influences how we interact with them. If I perceive a mum as being an overanxious parent then my attitude to her may well

influence the way I talk to her and what I say to her. This is even truer for students who present with learning and behaviour problems.

'S' relates to Skills and refers to the skills and knowledge that a teacher needs to complete a task. In the area of learning difficulties a certain level of skill is necessary to be effective.

The 'O' represents the Organisational Issues that impact on any learning situation and are present at each of the different system levels. The issues pertaining to each level impact on one another and are usually perceived as a top-down effect. The organisational issues at the systems level are to do with policy development and in this instance the policy developed by EDWA in the area of learning difficulties is the *Students At Educational Risk* document which guides strategies developed to work with students in this area.

Figure 3. Interactive (ISO) triangle



Organisational issues at the school level pertain to the implementation of systems policy and the acknowledgment of the needs of the students in the school. Once a school acknowledges a student need, then some degree of action is required to meet those needs and that initially requires the development of a collaborative education plan. Consequently resources needed to action the plan should cater for any professional development necessary.

Issue:
A multitude of factors contributes to effective change, not the least of which is the provision of

Implementation of the action plan at the classroom level relates to the teacher assessment of students perceived to be at risk in their learning and the adaptation of teaching practice and class organisation to meet those needs.

So even when you deliver professional development, you've got to take into account these sorts of things because how I deliver the professional development, what I say, and how I say it is a critical factor. But I've also got to have skills and knowledge in the area I'm talking about and I've got to have some sense that there's a policy that I'm tying things to, that there's an expectation the schools will act on the professional development given to bring about something positive.

The Interactive triangle works well in the classroom context also. If a teacher wishing to effect a positive change in a student's learning is supported by the system and school to do so, and possesses a high level of skills and knowledge, but has a negative attitude towards a student, then the student will feel picked on or resentful, and consequently little change will occur. For that reason the Interactive aspects of the ISO Triangle are the key to successful teaching/ training practice.

An alternative scenario might focus on a teacher having very positive interaction with their students and they might possess well-developed skills and understandings of how to work with students' learning difficulties. If the school does not support the teacher in their efforts to implement programs that meet the student's needs the chance of any real change in their learning is diminished. Hence it is crucial that the Organisational aspects are also attended to.

While still another scenario may be where the system and school are supportive and have policies and resources in place to assist teachers to implement effective programs. And the teacher has a positive attitude toward their students and the task at hand but lacks the necessary skills and knowledge in the area of learning difficulties to improve outcomes for students, then the outcomes will remain largely unaffected. Accordingly the Skills aspect of the ISO Triangle is fundamental to effective teaching and training practices also.

The triangle concept can also be used to look at the stakeholders in a learning difficulties scenario. The teacher, parent, Home Tutor, and the student all need to be working as a team towards a common goal that is agreed upon by all parties. Often this doesn't occur and is vital to student success in an isolated situation.

Teachers are responsible for developing a teaching and learning program and for implementing that program. So the key player is the teacher. Their job is to make sure that the stakeholders all work together because if the parent wants spelling fixed up, the teacher wants him to learn to read, and the kid wants to play football, the chance of achieving positive learning outcomes are lessened.

Observations made during 1994 trials in Joondalup and Balga clarified the advantages and disadvantages of a non-labelling approach to students learning difficulties. It was also perceived that the disadvantage of labelling students as *dyslexic* or *ADHD* or *socially disadvantaged* was

consistent systemic support.

Issue:
In the SOTA context, all stakeholders need to work together to assist the Home Tutor and teacher to work with the student.

Issue:
Teacher labelling of student's

that the teacher then looked to an external specialist to assist the student. This point of view was seen to disempower the teacher.

Labels may then become blockers, which may stop teachers from doing anything. If I've got 30 kids in my class and this kid's got ADHD, I need an expert to tell me about ADHD because I don't know anything about it. This other kid has got a social problem, so I really need a social worker. And so by using labels it is possible that the classroom teacher can become disempowered.

And what could happen in a scenario like that is that the classroom teacher could be so apprehensive about doing the right thing for these children, that they may not do anything, or they could get seduced into going down a pathway that wasn't our responsibility. We are educators. We have a responsibility to teach and that is our area of expertise and we shouldn't be handballing educational issues to somebody else when they belong to us.

From the perspective of a trainer it also became important to be able accept the perceptions that teachers had about their ability to cope with learning difficulties. What became important for Dorothy was to find ways to assist teachers to come to their own realisations and move along the continuum toward a more empowering perception of themselves as teachers of students with learning difficulties.

Ask the right questions. The questions are the key thing. Then you can actually make people move themselves along the continuum. You don't have to do it. Now that's what professional development is about.

Key concepts of the training

There are several key concepts that form the basis of the training of the Support Officers Learning Difficulties. The first of these is that teachers can make a difference to the learning outcomes of students with difficulties. To achieve this they may need to be trained in requisite skills, but most importantly they would need to be supported through a mentoring process which would help to change their perceptions of their ability to do so.

They can't do it by themselves because they're taking these first teeny little steps out of this deficit model into this collaborative problem-solving model.

The belief then, is that it is the job of the teacher to do something about improving educational outcomes for students. Once identified, students at educational risk were entitled to an educational program fitting their needs and it was most appropriate that teachers do this rather than wait for an external 'expert' to do so.

As a consequence of the research and information reviewed, the problem solving process becomes central to the entire training program. Teaching people to look at an issue and find collective ways to resolve it is seen to

learning difficulties was perceived to contribute to the belief that they were unable to assist students with learning difficulties.

Issue:
Teachers need to be provided with the resources to effect positive learning outcomes for students with learning difficulties.

alleviate obstacles that might block possible solutions.

The stakeholders, who are: the student, parents, Home Tutor, teacher and Support Officer Learning Difficulties, worked as a team towards a common goal. This concept also provided an opportunity to acknowledge the contribution made by the parents, Home Tutors, and teachers of students in remote and isolated areas.

Aims of the training

The Support Officer Learning Difficulties training was set up to meet several objectives:

- To assist the teachers as participants to make the transition from classroom teacher to Support Officer Learning Difficulties;
- To introduce a collaborative problem-solving process as a framework for service delivery;
- To enhance and extend participants' knowledge, understanding and skills in the area of learning difficulties;
- To promote awareness of the factors relevant to educating students experiencing difficulties with learning in remote and rural areas.

I wanted to establish the group with a common working framework within that problem solving process. Then the Support Officers would speak the same language with the same frame of reference about - how to resolve things, what more we have to do, what our needs are. They can identify things for themselves within the problem solving process I've spoken about.

The role of the Support Officer Learning Difficulties required those selected to make a commitment to students who were experiencing difficulties with learning and in real terms that meant a move away from family and friends to an isolated, rural part of Western Australia. Consequently it became important that the training group establish themselves as a team so that they could sustain their own support network to counter the social and professional isolation that they would be confronted with. It was also seen as important that the training was clearly tied in with EDWA's Student at Educational Risk Policy.

Furthermore it was vital that the Support Officers Learning Difficulties had a clear understanding of what their roles were and what they were not. Even though they would receive some skills training in the area of learning difficulties they would need to know where to access further information to resolve issues as they arose. For that reason it became necessary that they felt comfortable with the non-expert approach.

Components of the Training Program

The training program was made up of connected components to do with team building, problem-solving, perceptions of the day-to-day realities of people living and learning in isolated situations, the acquisition of skills

and tools to assess student needs, and a practicum. A component that clearly articulated the Support Officer Learning Difficulties's responsibilities was also included.

Team building

To facilitate team building Dorothy needed to interact with everybody in the group to ensure their involvement. She began by assisting the participants to identify their strengths. Exercises based on their own personal experiences provided them with the opportunity to relate in a meaningful way to the issues raised and to have their contributions recorded and valued by the group. In spite of the fact that each participant was relating a totally different experience about the topic under discussion some key points could be extracted. This was a very successful way to engage the participants as it allowed them to come to the same realisations that the researchers had come to. Allowing the participants to work through their own thinking on vital issues resulted in a greater ownership of the professional development that they were experiencing.

I would think that if I mention certain exercises they would be able to switch back into that because I knew at the time the impact it was having on them, I watched it.

Perceptions of life in remote and rural situations

Using exercises developed from the work of Judith Rivalland and Bill Loudon, Dorothy began to work with the participants' perceptions of the daily realities faced by people living in remote situations. Asking the participants to place themselves in role of parents in various isolated situations and getting them to problem-solve different scenarios helped them to understand the circumstances that families lived and worked in. Focusing on how they would act in given situations and what they could do to alleviate parental concerns enabled the participants to ask questions and discover how they would cope as a Support Officer Learning Difficulties in the same situation.

Problem solving

Problem solving was used to establish a basis for the skill component of the Support Officer Learning Difficulties training. Dorothy modelled the practice of problem resolution through group collaboration and the participants worked through this process daily. Frequent opportunities to practise problem solving provided support for the participants in their transition from classroom teacher to Support Officer Learning Difficulties.

A concerted effort was made to move the participants thinking away from focusing on the notion of the problem to having the solution. By presenting both a deficit model and the problem solving process and looking at the advantages and disadvantages of both the participants were able to consider possible alternatives. Particular attention was paid to establishing how the Support Officers Learning Difficulties would be able to support the other stakeholders in each case, given that it is the Home Tutor and teacher who are working with the student.

Skills and tools

The remainder of the skill component focused on training in the use of assessment tools that would assist School of the Air teachers to pinpoint more clearly the outcomes students were achieving and the areas of need requiring further work. The Builder Reading Assessment Technique is a simplified version of miscue analysis, which was used to assist the participants to listen to student's reading and be able to make some sensible and quick appraisals of what they had heard.

Psychologists in schools when asked by teachers to assess student reading often use a standardised test called the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability. Such analysis is invaluable and the information to be gained from using a tool of this kind is extremely useful to teachers and the programs of reading that they develop. Unfortunately when psychologists complete such analyses teachers generally only look at the final scores, whereas the most vital part of the information gathered is in the body of the analysis.

If teachers could find out what they had to teach there was no problem as they were teachers. But when it (results of analysis) came to them as a standardised test with just a score, they would perhaps become annoyed with the psychs because they didn't tell them anything they didn't already know. There was no sense of 'I'm pleased about this information.' Whereas when we trained them and taught them how to do it themselves it was - 'Wow. It confirmed what I already thought!' This then gave teachers an indication where to put the kids in terms of reading skills/ materials, so they then knew exactly what they had to teach.

Other assessment tools included in the Support Officer Learning Difficulties kits were the LARR, the MIST, the EYES. An emphasis was also given to the teaching and assessment of phonemic awareness.

The practicum

The practical aspect of their training required the participants to work as Support Officers Learning Difficulties with teachers at Mosman Park and North Fremantle primary schools. Feedback sessions at the end of each practicum provided the participants with the opportunity to articulate what had occurred for them. This helped them to consider what was successful in their practice and what they might do differently when they next worked as a Support Officer Learning Difficulties. Negative experiences during the practicum were used to help individuals work out where they needed further support or assistance and what they could do to change their approach to the role.

And they came up with some really mature professional understandings about themselves and their role and what was going on. The practicum gave them an opportunity to try out and experience some of that joy, some of the stresses, some of the anxieties, as well as giving them an opportunity to try out this new role. I think an advantage for the team was that they learned these new skills within a supportive environment.

The problem solving process became useful in this situation as it allowed the participants to identify their problem and figure out what it was that they needed to do. It also became evident that with mutual support the participants could help each other to work through assessments that they might have difficulty understanding.

And they worked out very rapidly that they didn't all have to do everything. So one SOLD could become very knowledgeable about the Neale and another SOLD could become very knowledgeable about the BRAT and then they could swap information. That's a key factor in team collaboration. We don't need to know everything.

The five-week long training program afforded Dorothy the chance to work with the participants in a way that moved them along a continuum of development from classroom teacher to Support Officer Learning Difficulties. It also meant that the group had time to return to material initially presented to work through it more thoroughly as the need arose.

Responsibilities of the Support Officer Learning Difficulties

It was necessary to define which were the Support Officer Learning Difficulties responsibilities and which were not. Primarily it is the Support Officer Learning Difficulties's function to empower teachers in their work with students who have learning difficulties. They need to assist teachers to identify student needs and then support them to develop and implement programs to meet those needs. It is also their job to extend teachers' understandings and knowledge of effective teaching practices so that they can independently select the practice which best fits the needs of the student they are working with. It was also seen as important for Support Officers Learning Difficulties to encourage teachers to accept responsibility for bringing about educational outcomes for all students and to utilise the information gained from allied professionals to guide them in their work.

Support Officers Learning Difficulties are also responsible for ensuring that teachers attend to what they can do effectively to provide educational support within the classroom context rather than focus on external factors beyond their control.

It does happen unfortunately, that they (teachers) look for a reason for kids' behaviour, for example, focusing on things the parents won't do, like help children with their homework or provide the support their children need to succeed at school. You can't control that. So we need to look at what we can effectively do. You can't change things at home but you can do something about a kid in your classroom. And so I think it's really important that the support officers have an understanding of those issues, so that they can discuss them openly and professionally with others.

Dorothy wanted to make it very clear to the Support Officers Learning Difficulties that promoting themselves or their professional preferences for learning difficulties' solutions was not a part of the Support Officer

Learning Difficulties's responsibility.

It's not for them to focus on their perception and their solution because what works for one person may not work for another. And it is not to encourage the identification of students for labelling.

Recruitment

When Dorothy had finished writing the training program, she was asked to assist in the training of two groups of Support Officers Learning Difficulties. One group was trained for School of the Air; the other group were to work in the Perth metropolitan area and were based at the Centre for Inclusive Schooling. Wherever possible these two groups were to be amalgamated to provide further support and to allow for greater networking.

Dorothy was responsible for the recruitment of the original group of the School of the Air Support Officers Learning Difficulties and realised that finding five applicants to go to isolated schools could be difficult. Not only was it going to be hard to find teachers willing to work in remote situations but it was also going to be hard to locate teachers with a background in learning difficulties.

I think the role of Support Officer-Learning Difficulties could be seen as very unattractive. They increase their hours of work from school hours to Public Service hours. They decrease their holidays and have to put in an awful lot of extra effort. They're much more likely to be subjected to other outside pressures and by default that means criticisms and all of those other emotional sorts of pressures. They have to cope with separation from friends and family.

Issue:
Conditions of employment and staff turnover deserve further consideration.

The last word

Given that five weeks sounds like an incredible luxury, those SOTA SOLDs worked ten weeks. They were really incredible, the effort they made. Dedicated. Committed. That was the end of my career with the Department and I don't think I could have asked for anything more satisfying and more rewarding than working with those people. They were all just tops. They're dedicated, caring people and while they started off as classroom teachers I believe they finished the course as SOLDs with a greater understanding of themselves, their role, and the environment they would be working in.

Jim Keen

Principal of School of the Air

Jim Keen's career in education in Western Australian schools spans the last thirty-one years. He has worked as a Principal of small schools and Deputy Principal of large schools in country and metropolitan contexts, covering a wide range of the state. For the past seven years Jim has been a School of the Air Principal. He has been in his present school for the past two years.

The School of the Air context

The School of the Air where Jim currently works has 47 students who mostly come from families employed within the primary or service industries. Families who are working in a service industry might be employed to run roadhouses or work within Aboriginal corporations, while those connected to primary industry tend to be people working on stations who traditionally have enrolled their children as School of the Air students.

Several smaller groups of families contribute to the school population and include those who might be from Aboriginal communities or who, for various reasons, choose to access an alternative educational arrangement for their child. In many School of the Air settings the provision of adequate educational programs to Aboriginal families has been complex and has required staff to have a flexible, problem solving approach to effect real educational outcomes. Presently there is only one Aboriginal family attached to the School of the Air and the children from this family are performing well in their work with mainstream educational programs.

Issue:
Catering for the needs of itinerant students is complex.

Usually in any School of the Air over a period of years you will have the community Aboriginals come in and come out and they have a cyclical attendance program which will find them moving between communities in the area. They would only rotate within their cultural environment, so that particular group is a difficult group to service in terms of learning difficulties.

Another small group of families that access the School of the Air are those who choose to home school their children via distance education. Families enrolling with the School of Isolated and Distance Education in Perth who are able to provide a commitment that they will be in a School of the Air's intake area for at least six months are able to make use of the distance education materials. Some of the people in this group are those who live an alternative lifestyle and choose not to participate in mainstream education, others may be travelling for extended periods of time and consequently are unable to send their children to a mainstream school.

From time to time, in Schools of the Air, students will be enrolled who fall into an 'at risk' category. Parents in isolated situations who do not perceive that their child's education is a priority can take advantage of the

Issue:
Monitoring the quality and

School of the Air arrangement to employ their child in ways that suits them.

delivery of distance education.

For example on some stations when it comes to mustering time and all that sort of thing, there are people that will have their kids working like slaves rather than educating them every day. So there are a whole range of issues to do with being out of sight and out of mind.

Students who have been excluded from mainstream schooling are also frequently enrolled at the Schools of the Air, as are those who might be unable to participate in mainstream schooling for medical or psychological reasons on a short or long-term basis.

We had one little boy last year that had rheumatic fever. Both his parents were teachers teaching in the town but he got to the stage where he just couldn't do anything and we accessed a teacher aide for him through Disability Services for six months. He was part of the School of the Air setting for six months until he could be integrated back into his school scene.

The Staff

The school has a staff of seven teachers. Jim describes a normal School of the Air teacher's workload as managing a class of eight to ten students for which one air lesson would be given each day for approximately half an hour. The teacher then has further communication with their students via phone or the Internet. Presently the school is in the process of connecting to all families by email so that there is a facility for more advanced interaction between the teachers and their Home Tutors and students. The teachers also make a minimum of three visits to their students and family each year. More visits are arranged as required, depending on the nature of the student's educational need and the difficulties experienced. Teachers also have contact with their students at camps and seminars organized by the School of the Air staff on a regular basis.

Issue:
SOTA teachers need to be flexible in their approach to the delivery of services.

Generally the students at this School of the Air interact with their teachers by radio at least once a day. However, it is not compulsory for students to do air lessons and the School of the Air is organized to provide for groups of families who participate in air lessons and those who for various reasons do not. Consequently the form of contact that teachers have with students who don't participate in air sessions tends to be limited to the telephone or fax.

Jim believes that although Schools of the Air are structured differently to mainstream schools and are constrained by factors to do with isolation, there are many common educational issues that both types of schools need to deal with. One of these concerns relates to issues pertaining to students with learning difficulties.

Usually it's those families that have (students with) learning difficulties who are likely to be the ones that don't have self-initiated contact with us. We usually have to initiate contact or they might have contact with us on a superfluous type

note where it would be nice to chat to us and talk about all the things bar the real issues.

The students, the needs

In any School of the Air context the amount of isolation experienced by families usually has a direct bearing on students' educational needs. This does not seem to be the case at this School of the Air as quite a number of families are within a two-hour drive of the small town in which the school is situated, while a smaller group of families are within four to five hours from the town. Over fifty percent of the School of the Air's families would be able to get to town once a week or more with others would get to town at least once every two weeks.

Another factor that usually contributes to students' educational need is the level of economic security that a family enjoys. In sharp contrast to the previous School of the Air that Jim worked at, the families from this particular School of the Air are reasonably secure financially.

Within the school's small population there appears to be a large number of students at educational risk in terms of literacy and numeracy. And while most of these students require further support to help them achieve benchmark levels, one student receives academic extension by regularly attending a PEAC course in town.

To be able to cater for the students who are seen to be at risk in their learning, the staff at the school need to be able to provide curricula that are suited to the individual child's needs. Jim has been working with the Support Officer Learning Difficulties to assist teachers to understand the range of curricula that they can make available to students. Underpinning this work is the notion that the teachers themselves are responsible for the curriculum that is presented to a student by their Home Tutor. Even though teachers accept this as daily practice in mainstream schools, it has not traditionally been the case in Schools of the Air

Issue:

In the past teachers have been reluctant to provide an individualised curriculum beyond the framework provided by SIDE.

And one of the things that a School of the Air has a problem with is that historically all of our material (set work) has been written centrally by the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE). Teachers coming into a School of the Air from mainstream background classes, where they've been used to writing programs of education for their kids in their class, for some unknown reason come into a School of the Air, they go down to dispatch room and there's the curriculum. And that's all that we'd give our kids. Now that's actually broken down a lot in the last three years since we started to work along the lines of Individual Education Plans.

Over the last few years with the support of the Support Officer Learning Difficulties the process used to develop Individual Educational Plans at the School of the Air has encouraged teachers not to look at the set work provided by School of Isolated and Distance Education as the only curriculum available to isolated students. Teacher involvement in the development of a student's curriculum provides them with the opportunity to express their professional opinions about a child's learning, test those opinions and then provide a program of work

Issue:

Stakeholders are required to work collaboratively and in some cases this can be problematic.

designed to improve the educational outcomes for that student. In utilising such a process teachers have to work with the team of stakeholders involved in each case.

A teacher might identify an area of concern for a particular student and they'll come to me and say, "Look, this kid is not able to do such and such." Then the teacher goes and discusses it with the SOLD officer and the Home Tutor, and they might go and discuss it with other members of the staff. And then finally a consensus will be agreed upon to work through some sort of programming format for the child.

One of the more difficult challenges for the School of Isolated and Distance Education has been to provide materials and set work to students in isolated situations that is relevant to their context. Given that Western Australia is so geographically diverse this has been a difficult task to achieve easily. However, thanks to procedures put in place to trial programs of work there has been a greater level of curriculum development appropriate to the circumstances in which students and Home Tutors work.

In the past somebody just wrote the set materials and the writer might have come from Kalgoorlie and was writing a set for Year 3 about autumn. So the kids might have been expected to go out and pick up some leaves off the ground to do art with, or paint with. The only thing that was wrong with that was that those materials were distributed statewide. So here's some kid in the middle of the wet in Halls Creek asked to go outside and says to his mother, "Where are the leaves falling from the trees? Leaves don't fall from trees up here." Or it might be the cyclical season of a particular insect that doesn't even exist in some WA environments.

To be able to teach students in an isolated setting it is vital that Home Tutors are provided not only with materials that are contextually appropriate but also with a curriculum that is suitable to their circumstance. This requires an understanding of the physical setting and the daily routines that contribute to the constraints of teaching in such settings. Consequently, parents look to the teachers with whom they work alongside to understand not only the educational needs of their students, but also their needs as Home Tutors teaching in diverse contexts.

Accordingly, parents in a School of the Air setting need to feel that they can access teachers as the need arises and this requires a less formal arrangement be put in place to accommodate their needs. Jim sees that a successful School of the Air is one in which the principal and teachers are able to employ a more relaxed and supportive way of working with parents that requires greater levels of involvement than is normally required in mainstream schools.

You can't survive in a School of the Air without being a part of each family's life and them being a part of your life. I guess all the needs are fairly heavily intertwined. If somebody says, "Look I'm going to Perth on holidays next weekend, can I drop some work in to the school on Sunday?" You can't say, "No, this is my time." But here,

Issue:
In the past set work provided by SIDE may have been inappropriate to the contexts in which some SOTA students work.

Issues:
Parents and teachers working in the SOTA context need to be open to a more complex working relationship.

they'll ring you up and we'll say, "Just give us a ring when you get to town and I'll go down and open the school up and you bring your work." That sort of thing.

The level of involvement required of the School of the Air staff with the families attached to the school is often time consuming. A typical example of this can be seen in the collaboration between the school's Parents and Citizens group and the staff of the School of the Air. A recent fundraising venture saw the teachers and parents working together to cater for a social event during the local race round. Jim is of the opinion that many teachers in mainstream schools would be averse to giving up their weekends to do such work on a regular basis. Jim perceives such co-operation is essential to the establishment of the collaborative environment needed to make a School of the Air perform well.

Jim's style of management is one that encourages teachers to take ownership of EDWA initiatives and school implementations. He prefers to see teachers managing curriculum areas and contributing to the running of the school and having some say in how that is done.

In any school it's very important that it has the right sort of collaborative interactions. In a School of the Air teachers have far more autonomy than you will ever see in a mainstream school and teachers going back to a mainstream school often notice that. And it's very important that that culture survives and exists in a School of the Air.

A principal's perspective of the role of Support Officer Learning Difficulties

Jim has been involved with the development of the role from its inception. He recalls that it originated from a situation in the Pilbara area where the Isolated Children's Parents' Association moved to have a travelling Special Needs teacher employed to meet the needs of students who were having learning difficulties. At the same time the service provided by the Chidley Education Centre for students with learning difficulties from rural and remote schools, was reviewed and the New Chidley Model developed.

I was involved at that stage, as were the other School of the Air principals, and the idea was to develop a role for a teacher to attend to the needs of children experiencing learning difficulties within Schools of the Air settings. I think something like 15-20% of our children, that's about 67 or 70 of them out of the total intake of the Schools of the Air, were experiencing learning difficulties over a period of time and in any given year. And so five Support Officers Learning Difficulties went through the training process and then they came back to us at the Schools of the Air.

Jim recalls that some of the principals were naturally sceptical as to the outcomes that could be achieved from the new model, while others were uncertain about having personnel in their school who weren't directly accountable to them. The fact that the Support Officer Learning Difficulties were not in the Schools of the Air to work directly with

Issue:
Collaboration of all staff is vital in the SOTA context.

Issue:
Provision of education services to students with learning difficulties in remote and rural areas.

Issue:
SOLDs are required to work directly with teachers and

students having difficulties was also an issue to be reckoned with.

Of course these SOLDs had been taught a process whereby they would teach teachers to assess students and then implement individual education plans to assist parents but they wouldn't go and take over a program of work. And that was quite right because the ownership of the plan had to be with the group of people that teach and the parent and the child. So they were very well trained, but they weren't exactly taken in with open arms by some sectors and still aren't today, I don't think.

Jim's experiences with the Support Officers Learning Difficulties who have worked with him have been positive and he puts this down to the attributes of the personnel involved. He highlights the need for the Support Officers Learning Difficulties to be able to develop rapport with the principal and staff of the School of the Air and even more importantly with the parents and the students enrolled there. Similarly, the ability to have a good understanding of the locations and situations in which families live and work is essential.

The SOLD that I worked with had a very good rapport with the staff, she had a good rapport with the principal, and she had an excellent rapport with the parents and the students. She knew the locations and she had very good local knowledge. There were two different forces working, a political force that made sure it needed to work and another force of people who really wanted it to work and I believe it's got to the stage where it really does work.

The Support Officer Learning Difficulties who came to the School of the Air that Jim presently manages did not have the initial advantage of working in a familiar, established working environment. Coming from outside the School of the Air system, the Support Officer Learning Difficulties had to develop a rapport with the staff and parents and their students from the outset. The hard work put in to do this is now paying off as Jim sees that the model has successfully worked in this instance.

Jim sees the initial phase of the integration of the Support Officer Learning Difficulties into the School of the Air as being concerned with teachers developing more enthusiasm for working with students at educational risk. He has noticed that the whole staff are more confident in their approach to the identification of students learning needs and have benefited from the support that the Support Officer Learning Difficulties has given them in developing individual education plans. Once the staff was able to clearly understand the role that the Support Officer Learning Difficulties would play in helping them to develop their own skills in working with students and parents, they were more accepting of her presence.

A second phase being entered into at the School of the Air revolves around the Support Officer Learning Difficulties work with external support services, which do not necessarily fall within the domain of education. Parents often need assistance to access the services of agencies such as the Health Department or Family and Children's Services and this responsibility has often fallen to the classroom teacher. In a remote or rural situation, issues to do with accessibility can further

Home Tutors
not students.

Issues:
The ability of the SOLD to become involved with the SOTA community is vital to the successful fulfilment of the role.

Issue:
SOLDs helping teachers to assess students and write IEPs.

Issue:
Ability of SOLDs to co-ordinate allied services to work with teachers, Home Tutors,

complicate the job of co-ordinating appointments for parents coming into town to meet with a service. This is more complex still, if more than one service is required or if the service isn't based permanently in the town. Similarly, problems can arise if students need to work regularly with an external agency for any period of time. In this instance the Support Officer Learning Difficulties has begun to take responsibility for accessing those services required by students and to orchestrate and co-ordinate the stakeholder roles involved in each case.

So we've got a person who's able to make a whole lot of contacts that need to be made to set up programs for children. One example of this is a program that was set up for a child to do speech lessons by phone once a week, so that she could get some speech and hearing work done. Now that was all put in a place through the collaboration of the SOLD and the teacher and the parent. Very difficult.

and students with learning difficulties.

The stakeholders

The people directly involved with a student having learning difficulties are the parent, Home Tutor, and teacher. Often the Home Tutor is the parent but in some instances the Home Tutor or governess is an employee of the family.

Initial concerns about a student will be raised between the teacher and Home Tutor/ parent and further collaboration with the Support Officer Learning Difficulties will occur after that. The Support Officer Learning Difficulties then works to support the Home Tutor/ parent and teacher and after an initial meeting between these three stakeholders, the Principal is then invited to become involved in the collaboration.

A parent working outside this process who contacts the Principal or Support Officer Learning Difficulties before raising concerns with the teacher is referred back to the teacher so that the ownership of programs developed remains with the teacher.

Assisting the teacher, teaching the teacher, giving the teacher the power to develop these programs is what this is all about. But if the parent goes directly to the Principal they've bypassed the teacher. So one moment we're saying we'll train teachers to assess kids and give them some assistance in developing an IEP, and then we go around behind their back. So rather than do that I'll set the collaborative cycle back in place again.

Jim will work with the teacher and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties to resolve issues that they might have in working with a student or each other, and he also works alongside them to help parents who are having difficulty coping in a particular situation. The role that he takes in the collaborative process is usually informal and flexible and often is determined by the needs of the other stakeholders.

Jim is more formally involved in the evaluative aspects of the process when appraisals are made of students' programs. At the end of each year the teacher and Support Officer Learning Difficulties assess students who have been working on modified set work or an IEP and a summary

Issue:
Principal and SOLD responsible for maintaining involvement of all stakeholders.

Issue:
Principal to support SOLD and teachers to work with each other.

of the program and further recommendations are recorded onto an end-of-year Handover Sheet. Parent and Home Tutor issues are also noted, along with the way in which these issues were addressed and the outcomes of any action taken. This document is then shared with the Principal, the student's successive teacher, and specialist teachers and retained as a record by the Support Officer Learning Difficulties and the Principal.

At the end of each year Jim prefers to discuss the students' reports with the teachers so that he has an understanding of what each student has achieved. Since the parents of School of the Air students are so closely involved in the teaching of their children it is important that any reports of their child's progress are clear and useful to their on-going job of teaching.

I want teachers to justify what they're saying about a child so the parent can read and understand it. And then we'll know where we're going. If the parent can't read it I'm not sure that it's serving a great deal of purpose. And we want the succeeding teacher to be able to look at it and have enough information to go on and work with that parent and kid in that situation.

Issue:
Reporting to parents needs to clearly state outcomes achieved and the possible directions for future learning.

Working for success

Assessments used to gather information about student progress are an important part of the school's assessment/ planning/ evaluation/ feedback cycle. The School Development Plan includes a Management Information System, which is produced annually to organise the cyclical process of assessment, and the information gathered for this comes from a range of sources. Formal assessments are gathered annually from standardised testing and state and federal government benchmark testing. Teacher assessments are collected throughout the year and inform on-going program development for students as well as contributing to the school's collation of information. Literacy Net assessments provide an overview of the gains made by students in the area of literacy, while highlighting the areas of need that teachers and the school needs to focus on. For those students identified as having learning difficulties and needing specialised programs of support, handover sheets are completed at the end of each year. The Home Tutor, Teacher and Support Officer Learning Difficulties collaborate to summarise what has occurred for each student in a particular year and what needs to occur to continue the support given in the next year.

Issue:
Adequate assessment procedures are fundamental to the identification of students with learning difficulties and the continuity of their programs.

The most important conclusion that is to be drawn from the evaluation recorded on the Handover Sheet, is whether the student who has been working on an individualised program has progressed beyond the '20% risk area'. This identification typically describes students achieving in the bottom 20% of their cohort who are considered to be at educational risk. Some students will remain in this 'at risk' category for long periods of time, while others are assisted more quickly to resolve any difficulties that they may have.

Teaching in the School of the Air context is complicated by the fact that teachers are required to assist Home Tutors/ parents to teach their own children. In a great number of cases parents have no teaching

Issue:
Teaching students with

qualifications and have only their past schooling experiences to call on. Consequently, the relationship between students and their Home Tutors greatly affects the learning environment and the relationship between teacher and Home Tutor needs to be positively constructive to cater for that. In some situations the programs that have been devised have not worked for a student and in spite of the collaborative process, the stakeholders involved in a case have had to revise their approach many times.

We've had it happen too where many, many programs haven't worked for a student. In one instance teachers were butting their heads up against a brick wall when a child wasn't doing any work at all, but the plan needed to take into account that the mother wasn't prepared to be a tutor working with the student all the time. And when you have a child with many learning difficulties it's not reasonable to expect that they can be left to work independently, no matter their age. And there were lots of excuses. People put up barricades.

So the Home Tutor, teacher and the SOLD got together to put an individual education plan that catered for the Home Tutor and the teacher and the SOLD spent the greater part of a day with the Home Tutor explaining how the IEP would work. It was a simple plan of a day with a series of sub-headings - child's reading rate, how he enjoyed reading today, what words he actually learned, did he use his spelling journal, you know, basically a journal, a parent journal. And we asked the Home Tutor to fax that to us each day at 3.30pm and she finally agreed to it. So instantly we'd gained a commitment to complete a certain amount of work.

First day we got nothing so we phoned her to see where the work was and the next day we had the work and every day to my knowledge since. And she's starting to get really pleased. Her son was in the habit of throwing a tantrum and taking off for two or three hours when he didn't want to do his work and when he came back he would just go and watch TV. But recently he got the shock of his life when he tried it and she said, 'You're not watching TV because you haven't done this school work yet.' It's the first time ... and he actually went and did it.

In mainstream classes, in the absence of parents, teachers are required to take responsibility for disciplining or admonishing students for inappropriate behaviour. This responsibility becomes confused when a parent is present in the school situation and as a consequence many teachers hesitate to admonish a child in front of their parents.

In the School of the Air setting, where parents are always involved in the teaching process, it is vital that teachers employ positive approaches to keeping students on task. Discipline needs to be delivered in conjunction with the parents and so teachers need to ensure that they can set up good channels of communication with parents in this regard. Jim perceives that most School of the Air students have a reasonably good standard of behaviour as the parents understand that in this setting the way their child behaves reflects on them as parents and is not something that their

learning difficulties whose parents/ Home Tutors are unwilling to co-operate is extremely difficult.

Issue:
SOTA staff need to persist with problem-solving process to find ways to work with Home Tutors and students.

Issue:
Parents reluctance to accept responsibility for their child's education.

Issue:
Parents inability to cope with behaviour management issues associated with learning difficulties.

children have learned from a playground setting.

The structure of the Support Officer Learning Difficulties positions

Initially the Support Officer Learning Difficulties positions were made Level 5 Public Service positions, created for the duration of a three-year period. Although the Support Officers Learning Difficulties attached to the Centre for Inclusive Schooling (CIS) work in the wider educational environment, which sees them working across a variety of schools within a district, the Support Officers Learning Difficulties attached to the Schools of the Air have been quarantined to their individual schools.

Issue: SOTA SOLDs availability to Districts.

In Jim's School of the Air this means that the Support Officer Learning Difficulties can only work outside of the School of the Air if a request is agreed to by both the Principal of the School of the Air and the Team Leader at the Centre for Inclusive Schooling. When Jim receives a request for the Support Officer Learning Difficulties at his school to provide professional development for teachers in other schools, he usually agrees to it, hoping that positive learning outcomes will be achieved for students as a consequence.

As a Principal, Jim was looking to the Support Officers Learning Difficulties in his schools to assist students who were achieving less than what was perceived they could achieve in learning outcomes. He points out that in the School of the Air context students can be underachieving, not because they were students who lacked the ability, but because their parents were not performing the tasks required of them as Home Tutors. Therefore the Support Officers Learning Difficulties had a three-fold task:

- to assist teachers to be more open to the development of a variety of pedagogies to meet the needs of students;
- to develop a rapport with the parent community;
- to work with the parents to achieve positive learning outcomes for their children.

And he perceives that they have managed to do this very successfully by simply ensuring that the stakeholders involved in a case have felt that they have been understood.

So the two good SOLDs I've worked with would probably make good psychologists, because they don't lose their cool and in most situations they are able to be very good mediators and I suppose if you took all those things into account, if you're not able to be a mediator and you're not able to put your own problems aside, you're not going to make a very good SOLD.

The difference made to teachers

Jim observes one of the significant benefits for teachers working with a Support Officer Learning Difficulties has been the shift away from a

'year level' perception of student needs to that of an individual orientation. He explains that traditionally in the School of the Air context teachers had become reliant on the set work designed by the School of Isolated and Distant Education to supply the curriculum that was to be taught to their students. This effectively contributed to the development of the 'year level' view of students' needs where the students had to measure up to a predetermined curriculum rather than the curriculum being developed to meet the individual student's needs. Consequently this discouraged teachers from using the skills that they were trained in to use their own professional judgement about the provision of curriculum appropriate to the needs of their students.

Over a period of time there has been a transition in thinking with regard to the curriculum presented to School of the Air students. This began with teachers and Home Tutors discussing how set work could be appropriately modified to match the capabilities of the students they were teaching.

I began to tell Home Tutors that if there was something in the set that they, as a Home Tutor, thought their student had already learnt then start a collaboration with the teacher, talk to one another and get rid of what wasn't necessary. Pretty simply sort of stuff, you know, something that most teachers would have done.

Following on from this, it soon became obvious to teachers and Home Tutors that in some instances, for some students, the set work provided wasn't suitable at all and that an individually crafted curriculum needed to be developed to meet their learning needs. The idea of writing separate education plans was met with some resistance from teachers who had become accustomed to only using the set work provided. However, in the mid to late 90s in both Schools of the Air and mainstream schools, there was a growing recognition that if a teacher was given the time to understand the context in which a student was working, then sets of work could be written which catered to the student's needs and interests, and assisted in improving learning outcomes.

Subsequent to this, when the Support Officer Learning Difficulties began to work at the School of the Air, she worked alongside the teachers to support them in developing individual education plans for students. This included the use of a range of assessments to ascertain what needed to be taught and then a discussion in collaboration with the student and Home Tutor as to which approach would be most appropriate to the situation that they were in. Over a period of time the teachers at the School of the Air have become more confident in assessing students and developing IEPs and the resistance to the time taken to do this has begun to diminish.

How well a SOLD could assist a mainstream class would be interesting. I suppose if you've got four or five kids that are in that 20% 'at risk' area in your class, then to do it properly you've got to give the teacher relief from the class so that she can initially discuss the problem with the SOLD. And then the teacher, the parents and the SOLD need to discuss the problem, and you'd have to do that four or five times to set up plans for each kid that needed it. We're doing it on a one to one basis because we have the time to fit it within our

Issue:
Teachers given permission to modify setwork and provide IEPs.

Issue:
Teachers' resistance to 'extra work' required to develop IEPs that may or may not be utilised by the Home Tutor.

Issue:
Provision of similar levels of support to mainstream schools has yet to be considered.

program because there aren't 30 children in a class waiting for the teacher to go back there.

The difference made to students

Jim has noticed that the Support Officer Learning Difficulties's work with teachers and Home Tutors has had various effects on the learning outcomes for students. He observes that the progress made by students is directly related to the way in which Home Tutors are able to work with their students.

As always, the kinds of kids that it's made a difference for are those kids whose parents are good tutors. The kinds of kids that it's made a little bit of difference for are those parents who are willing to give it a go but find it difficult to stick to it. And the kinds of kids that it's made absolutely no difference for are the parents who will agree to everything you set up and then won't do anything about implementing it. So there are three levels of degree and those failures aren't a failure on the part of the SOLD or the teachers and Principal.

The implementation of an IEP can require a lot of extra time and effort on the part of the Home Tutor and on some occasions parents who are Home Tutors are unwilling to provide the support needed to make the plan a success. As disheartening as this may be for teachers and Support Officers Learning Difficulties in this context, it is a constraint that all teachers learn to work around.

It's the hardest aspect of this work to deal with. I've seen a teacher put together a very good program and organize, during a week of his own school holidays, to go out to the parents' place, which was a five hour drive out from the township, to show the parent how to implement the program with her child. Now that teacher could have gone away for a break. On the day before he was due to drive out there, he was rung by the parents to say they wouldn't be there. And this used to happen with this family all the time.

The assessment/ planning/ evaluation/ and feedback cycle

In Jim's opinion the reporting process in Schools of the Air has always been very good. One of the written reports employed by all Schools of the Air is the Set Report that sees teachers updating records of student progress on set work approximately every two weeks. The Set Report covers the main curriculum areas of Language and Mathematics and makes up the major components of a student's set work. Teachers forward a copy of Set Reports to the Principal and the parents of the students in their class and thus maintain a reporting cycle, which informs parents on a regular basis.

Jim also encourages the teachers and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties to report on each home visit that they make. The Home Visit Report documents Home Tutor and parent concerns about the student,

Issue:

The success of a student's learning is largely dependent upon the Home Tutor responsible for the delivery of the curriculum.

Issue:

The assessment/ planning/ feedback/ cycle needs to be effective and regular, especially in the SOTA context.

observations made by School of the Air staff and concerns about the overall teaching situation, and outcomes achieved as a result of the visit.

Most of the other reporting mechanisms that are used at the School of the Air are the same as those used in mainstream schools. These may include the use of First Steps Continua to track students developmental progress, the application of the Literacy Net to screen students at risk in literacy acquisition or development, and the formal mid-year and end of year reports traditionally used.

Reporting to parents in the SOTA setting is not just centred on the two-weekly reports, we have a lot of verbal contact with the parents. I would hazard a guess that we get as much contact with our parents in one year that a mainstream school would get in five years. But that's the sort of interaction needed in a SOTA or in Distance Education, it has to be very strong and so not only are you reporting in the written word, you are providing verbal feedback all the time. And what the SOLD has done has embellished the reporting process, made it more collaborative. So now we've also got reports coming in which zero in on outcomes for individual students.

Benefits of the New Chidley Model

The provision of a Support Officer Learning Difficulties in the School of the Air context has meant that some of the issues to do with access to support services have been eased. When parents accessed support services through the Chidley Educational Centre their children were required to live away from home for lengthy periods and this was disruptive to the whole family. Jim cites other issues that were problematic with the old model such as the difficulty experienced by Home Tutors in implementing programs developed at Chidley in their home environments, and the time required to access support services from remote and rural situations.

By contrast the New Chidley Model provides an on-site Support Officer Learning Difficulties, who works within a collaborative framework to co-ordinate a range of services to parents and teachers, thus supporting them in the work that they are doing with their students. The link provided by the Support Officer Learning Difficulties to all the stakeholders in the collaborative process is seen to be vital.

So, the Support Officer Learning Difficulties is a huge benefit to have as a resource. So the parents have now got a psychological, educational support services resource all wrapped up in one person, who is quite willing to go out and see them on the basis of a phone call. You take that away from isolated people and then the classroom teacher has got to go and try and be a Support Officer Learning Difficulties. A Support Officer Learning Difficulties should be able to write themselves out of a job by helping teachers to be able to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties. But I think just having that person not in a teaching role is always going to be essential. It's the missing link between students,

teachers, parents, principals, and District Office.

Observations

Jim sees the New Chidley Model as one that is still evolving. He feels that, as with any implementation, the outcomes achieved by the model are dependent on the people implementing it. In this instance what is to be accomplished is dependent on the selection of personnel for the Support Officer Learning Difficulties positions and the matching of those selected to the Schools of the Air in which they are expected to operate. The need for Support Officers Learning Difficulties to work collaboratively with a range of people is fundamental to the model's success, as is the ability of a staff to work in a co-ordinated and cohesive fashion.

Jim considers that there is a need to ensure an on-going process of selection and training for Support Officers Learning Difficulties. He also believes that the training offered should replicate that given to the original Support Officers Learning Difficulties in 1998. An important consequence of the five-week training program was that the original Support Officers Learning Difficulties were able to form a close network that continues to support them in their work in the field.

So I don't think a rural and remote community where people are in distance education or served by a School of the Air can do without a SOLD now they're in that sort of place.

Issue:
Selection of the right personnel is fundamental to the success of the New Chidley Model.

Issue:
The on-going selection and training of SOLDs needs to be addressed.

Issue:
Replication of the original training is necessary for new SOLDs.

Bill Freeman

aged 10 years

Introduction

Bill and his family live on a station in the goldfields region of outback Western Australia. Bill is the youngest of three boys and this year his two older brothers have gone to boarding school in Perth. Bill continues his schooling at home as a School of the Air student with his mother as his Home Tutor. His mother, Mrs Freeman, has formal teaching qualifications but has never taught in a mainstream school situation. The Freeman family often makes the hour and a half journey to the local township to take part in sporting activities such as cricket.

The station has a schoolroom for the boys to work in, but this year Bill has begun to do his work at the kitchen table as he finds working in the schoolroom by himself is too lonely without his brothers. In spite of some speech difficulties, Bill is a sociable, self-confident boy and enjoys this learning environment and the interaction it brings with people as they go about their daily business on the station.

Groups of tourists and school children are welcome to tour the station and the funds raised provide an additional source of income to the Freeman family. Bill enjoys taking the groups on tour and speaking about his life in rural Australia. Mrs Freeman encourages him to do this as she believes that public speaking of this type boosts Bill's confidence and self-esteem. Consequently Bill frequently participates in the question and answer segments of the tours.

Bill enjoys being involved in the discussions and activities that the Freemans devise to add to the station's revenue. After discussions between Mrs Freeman, Bill's teacher David, and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties, it was agreed that there was educational value to be had from Bill's involvement in these activities and this has formed the basis of an alternative curriculum for him. Later in the year when the Home Tutors in the district came together to discuss the Curriculum Framework at the Home Tutor's seminar, the work completed with Bill was provided as an example of program development and program implementation.

Bill has been enrolled in SOTA since pre-primary and his mother, Mrs Freeman, has been his Home Tutor throughout his schooling.

Year Three

In the third term of his third year at school the Home Tutor had a meeting with Bill's teacher, David, and expressed concern with regard to the way Bill appeared to mix letters in words when he read. Up to this point his teacher had no concerns about Bill's reading as previous testing had indicated that he was reading at the correct year level. However, after discussion with the Support Officer of Learning Difficulties David decided that it would be appropriate to complete further testing and

Issue:
Confidence of Home Tutor/parent to raise issues to do with their child's learning difficulties.

devise an Independent Education Program to target the letters that Bill was having difficulty with.

To this end the Support Officer Learning Difficulties completed a series of assessments that analysed the way that Bill worked with letters, sounds and words when reading and the percentage accuracy of the texts that he read. In particular the data analysis from the QUEST assessment showed that although he was very good at visual discrimination and visual sequencing Bill was having difficulty using auditory discrimination and auditory sequential memory. As a consequence, Bill's set work was modified so that activities addressing word attack skills were added and the visual discrimination and visual sequencing skills that had been mastered were deleted.

An analysis of data from the Domain Phonic Test highlighted consonant and vowel confusions and blending inaccuracies and activities from *A Sound Way* were incorporated into Bill's Individual Education Plan. Similarly, the Single Sounds Probe indicated further letter/ sound confusions, which were to be focused on using a Mastery Learning sheet.

The Builder Reader Assessment Technique showed that Bill read Year 2/3 reading materials at 80 % accuracy and that he corrected 50% of his miscues. Consequently further teaching for Bill needed to focus on the articulation, explication and use of self-correcting strategies when reading.

David and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties shared the results of this testing with the Home Tutor and together they constructed an Individual Education Plan for Bill that the Home Tutor felt she would be able to work with. David then set about modifying Bill's set work while the Support Officer Learning Difficulties collated the required resources from *A Sound Way* and Mastery Learning that comprised the balance of his Individual Education Plan. Reading materials appropriate to Bill's instructional reading level were included which would ensure that he would be reading at a level that would facilitate the use of self-correction strategies more readily. To help the Home Tutor integrate the Individual Education Plan into the daily routine a feedback sheet was constructed for her to complete when the set work was done. This was then forwarded to David so that he was able to monitor Bill's progress and adjust the Individual Education Plan as required.

A record of interactions between Bill's Home Tutor, teacher and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties are kept on a Contact Sheet and this shows that Bill commenced his Individual Education Plan in term four and noted initial progress made.

3/ 12/ 98 David contacted Mrs F. She said Bill was blending and then using those skills as a part of his word attack strategy when reading. She is very happy with the progress and the fact that he is transferring his knowledge. To follow up, David asked Mrs F. to put her comments on audiotape.

10/ 12/ 98 SOLD contacted Mrs F. She is very happy with Bill's progress in blending 'gr' and 'bl'. He enjoyed reading the books he was given. Mrs F. has now made a spelling folder for Bob and during the holidays she will be working

Issue:
Teacher knowledge of appropriate assessments and their use.

Issue:
Establishing a form of communication that the parent feels comfortable with is important. In this instance oral rather than written communication was preferred.

on the Salisbury list. Mrs F. wanted to keep the phonetic word drill cards - she really liked them.

Year Four

At the beginning of term one the Support Officer Learning Difficulties reviewed the feedback returned to David regarding the activities undertaken by the Home Tutor in year three and decided to repeat some of the assessments previously completed to ascertain further progress made by Bill. A part of the Support Officer Learning Difficulties's role is to ensure that teachers have access to a variety of assessments and know how to use them and so Bill's reassessment provided an opportunity for the Support Officer Learning Difficulties to instruct David in the administration of a Neale Analysis. Following this David completed a Neale Analysis while the Support Officer Learning Difficulties repeated the Domain Phonics Test.

The Neale Analysis showed that Bill at age 8.1 was able to read at a rate of 74.6 words per minute and that his reading age for accuracy was 8.02 and for comprehension was 8.0. It also showed that even though Bill was confident enough to make guesses at words that he didn't know, these guesses often did not maintain meaning and that he omitted a variety of word endings.

The Domain Phonic Test showed that Bill still confused a range of initial, final and medial sounds, although some reversals had been corrected and fewer medial sounds were causing difficulty. Bill's guesses showed that he was paying attention to letters at the beginning, middle and end of words.

The notes on the Contact Sheet records a discussion between the Home Tutor and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties:

12/ 2/ 99 SOLD contacted Mrs F. Bill is having difficulties with three letter blends such as 'spr'. When he reads he fiddles and moves his leg. The Year 4 spelling list is very difficult. He has troubles with silent letters in words - engine, homestead, thieves, whistle. She will continue to do the spelling from the sets but she wants to concentrate on her own spelling words.

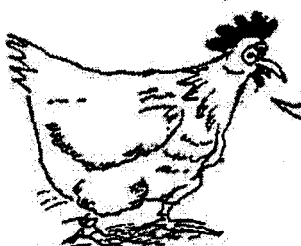
30/ 4/ 1999 SOLD contacted Mrs F. She has difficulty in getting Bill to describe patterns in Mathematics. Mrs F. is adapting the word study materials in the set work, which cuts down her workload. She is pleased that Bill is reading more fluently and she said that when Bill reads sometimes he adds an 's'. Mrs F. is getting Bill to group sounds in words when reading and spelling. She prefers work-sheets to activities when teaching a skill.

A sample of Bill's work

Day 6

Fable Summary

The fable "The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse" is quite long. Write a short paragraph to tell what the fable is about.




A paragraph is made up of a group of sentences about one idea or topic.

Paragraphs are one way to divide a story into parts. A paragraph always starts on a new line.

Indent → A ^{town} mouse ^{was having} holiday ^{he} and ^{he} town mouse ^{was having} got ^{homesick} home sick ^{went} so country mouse ^{went} back with the town mouse ^{mouse}

→ The country mouse ^{running} get sick of ^{running} run and ^{home} and ^{went} went back home.



David notes that when left to his own devices Bill writes as in this sample and that even though he is capable of editing his own work the Home Tutor usually has to remind him to do so. Bill has difficulty transferring oral language into the written form.

The Hand-Over Notes written at the end of the year record teacher and Home Tutor concerns to do with the student's learning that had become evident throughout the year. At the end of Year 4 David noted that in Spelling Bill had worked on a supplementary spelling program using sight vocabulary and that he used and applied these sight words in daily writing. He also used a THRASS chart to help him to spell unknown words and edit his written work for spelling errors. In Reading, books were sent to Bill that were at his instructional level which enabled him to

practise word attack strategies and that Bill's oral reading of written instructions was encouraged in air lessons. David notes that Bill's fluency and word attack skills had vastly improved.

Home Tutor concerns noted here are to do with Bill being behind in his set work and that discussions about time management had helped the Home Tutor to feel happier, but she continued to 'stress' about this issue.

Although recommendations were made for set work to continue to be modified where necessary and that further language assessment would also be required for Bill in Year Five, an Individual Education Program was not seen to be necessary.

Issue:
In the SOTA setting it becomes important to focus on the quality rather than the quantity of work that students are required to produce.

Year Five

The Support Officer Learning Difficulties and David paid an initial visit to the Freeman's station at the beginning of Year Five to discuss any issues to do with schooling in general or Bill's progress in particular. The Home Visit Report compiled notes that:

Bill is a bundle of energy and is working well in all areas. Both he and Mrs F. are much more motivated and on task now that the older boys are in Perth. Mrs F. is pleased with his progress and has no major issues at this time.

A recording of Bill's reading is made on this home visit and it is interesting to note the enthusiasm evident in his reading, although he continues to make many miscues that indicate that he is not yet consistently reading for meaning. Bill rushes his reading, attempting fluency at the expense of accuracy. Writing samples indicate that he is a prolific writer and is able to write across a variety of genres, including reports, book reviews, and recounts. However his handwriting is still very difficult to read even though he has made a great effort to improve it.

The Student

Bill perceives himself to be good at things that he can do easily and quickly such as writing on the computer, Maths, making things, 'chasing chooks' and mustering. He doesn't see himself as having difficulties reading and says that he finds most books easy to read except for ones containing Roman numerals and words that are "not generally used any more". He is able to discuss his understandings of reading and writing:

- Int: Can you tell me what your definition of reading is?
- Bill: Learning about how to do something in the picture, like what has happened in the past, or for school-work, or something like that.
- Int: If I was to walk into a classroom how would I know that a child was reading?
- Bill: You ask them some questions, they might have read a book before. Something like that.

Issue:
Students working alone in an isolated situation are often unable to compare their progress against that of their peers and therefore may not have a realistic perspective of their development or progress.

- Int: What about reading out aloud?
Bill: Yes, you can do that too.
Int: Tell me what writing is?
Bill: Writing down letters in a book and making sure they're spelt right and stuff like that.
Int: Is there a reason for writing?
Bill: So people can learn what you've done or something like that.
Int: So what are some of the reasons people read and write?
Bill: It's a way of making fun stories or reading something exciting.

Bill cites several strategies that he uses to find the meanings of words he doesn't know, which include using a dictionary, sounding out, or asking his mum. And when he doesn't understand what he has read he reads the text again.

Even though he considers that he has no difficulties reading Bill says that he would like to get better at his reading this year by reading more quickly. This indicates that he is aware that something slows him down when he is reading but he is not yet able to articulate what it is and what help he would need as a consequence. He seems to understand that good readers read fluently and his attempts to read quickly reflect this.

However, Bill has developed an understanding of the function of books and talks about how he has used them to help himself understand different ways of doing things:

- Int: Have you ever learnt about something just by reading and writing about it?
Bill: I have learnt about science books - how to read them. I found it's easier planting in the garden when the soil is wet and stuff like that. You read better ways to do it than the hard way. I read marine books to get the marron farm going. You can eat 56% of the marron and 36% of the yabbie. And I found out where you can eat it (from) other places where you don't want to eat it.
Int: Mum says that you like doing lots of cooking.
Bill: Yeah. When you read books, if you really like a recipe you can remember it for a long time.
Int: So you don't have to look at the book again, you can remember it all?
Bill: Like, if you like a really good recipe and you actually read it and do it by yourself instead of letting someone else do it, it's a lot easier, then you can remember it.

Bill is aware that he can ask for help from his teacher and his Home Tutor and he depends on both to tell him how to do things correctly and more easily. He sees his teacher as able to teach him new ways of doing maths and writing and he asks his Home Tutor to help him to read instructions correctly in his schoolwork and tests. Bill says that sometimes he will tackle difficult tasks independently before seeking

Issue:
Assisting students to work independently can become complicated by

help and that he can work things out by himself.

I just think about it pretty hard and have a look. If I'm meant to do a question I just look back into the book I'm meant to be reading out of and read the line.

Although Bill is yet to be able to articulate the particular strategies that he uses to help him with his reading and writing he is aware that he needs to use them to check his work and he relies on his mother to help him in this.

Int: Do you check your own work for mistakes and read it back so it makes sense?

Bill: Yes. I have to wait for mum though because when I read some words I don't always see the problems because I accidentally imagine it's there. So I keep on reading it out when it's not even there and it's meant to be there though.

Bill is aware that his set work has been modified and feels positive about the progress that he has made with his reading and writing as a consequence. He is very proud of the fact that he is able to read more quickly and his enthusiasm for non-fiction books is evident.

It's easier to read and stuff now. My reading and writing has got better. I just like reading science books. I can read a page in less than five minutes.

the parent/
child
relationship.

The Home Tutor

Mrs Freeman is Bill's Home Tutor and describes him as a practical person capable of looking at situations and thinking laterally to problem solve. Recently he has developed a great interest in history and most of his after school time is spent researching World War II. This includes going to the video store and looking for old war movies like "The Rats of Tobruk" and "The Desert Lions" and watching them with his father. He is also accessing extra reading materials and in particular is reading the Readers Digest Illustrated History of World War II, which gives a day by day account of the war. He is seeking out people to help him with his research and has been asking David about Japanese writing and where different battles were and who was involved in them.

Bill is relied upon to take on his share of practical tasks around the station. He drives his father to work and often drives out 16 kilometres from the homestead to pick up the workmen at night-time. He has also been pulling Bathurst Burr from the paddocks, for which he is paid \$6.00 an hour. The Home Tutor describes the construction of a yabby tank as a project that particularly interested Bill.

It was a family idea and we discussed how to build it and we let Bill have three days off school and photographed him working. And there was a lot of maths in making sure that it was rectangular and that it was strong enough to hold that amount of water. There was a lot of discussion about how we could make it so the sides wouldn't fall out. And we discussed the filtration system and Bill and I have done a lot

Issue:
Policy needs to be flexible in relation to the completion of set work. It is possible in an outcomes focussed curriculum to incorporate real life situations into the daily education program of students.

of experiments on filters at home. And we constructed one using a piece of foam sponge and an existing tap filter and it was actually filtering the water. We discussed how that was making micro-organisms grow in the sponge that would eat all the nutrients. So we were keeping very small amounts of water with the marron in it actually filtered.

The Home Tutor identifies writing and spelling as some of the concerns she has about Bill's learning. She notes that Bill is yet to consistently transfer spelling words learned into his work and that he misses out a lot of words when he is writing. Consequently she is constantly prompting him to edit his work by re-reading and putting omitted words into his writing. She is also concerned about the way in which Bill is easily distracted from his work and is always ready to discuss what is happening on the station. The positive aspect of this interest in what goes on around him is that Bill will get up early to get on with his schoolwork so that he can spend time doing what interests him at the end of his school day.

Bill is a sociable boy and has noticed the absence of his brothers in his schooling environment. This year he has been doing his schoolwork in the kitchen, which has provided him with some interaction with the station's community during the day and also had positive consequences for his reading and writing.

The schoolwork is part of the day, it's on the kitchen table. If people come in he does get distracted but at least he's getting that interaction. He doesn't like reading fiction. It's really difficult to get him to sit down and read fiction, he's just not interested. So being at the kitchen table he is often now reading the sports pages and newspaper and even when he's meant to be doing something else he'll say "Oh Mum, look. Did you see such and such?" And he's been reading the newspaper, but at least it's reading. He's never read before.

On a recent visit to a bookshop the Home Tutor discovered that Bill didn't like reading fiction and he was given the opportunity to choose any book that he liked on the condition that he actually read it. The book that Bill chose was about the amphibious tanks and cars used in WWII and it was after he read this book that his interest in the subject of WWII developed.

A major focus for the Home Tutor has been to assist Bill to improve his handwriting and retain some idea of what an acceptable standard of writing is. Since Bill has been working in the house as opposed to the schoolroom he is making greater use of the computer to do final drafts of his written work.

We've worked out his handwriting was awful, so I've got him a new pencil that winds through and he's much more effective with those. His handwriting improves when I make him do the lesson everyday. As soon as I don't it falls back, so it's practising and keeping an idea of what the standard is. Not just to write - he's often doing a lot of writing anyway - so it's - 'This is the standard that you have to write at.'

Issue:

The extent to which the teacher and SOLD are able to effect positive learning outcomes is dependent on the quality of the relationship between student and Home Tutor.

A final draft written on the computer

The Great Escape

On the holidays I went to the Great Escape water slides at Hillary's Boat Harbor. There are four slides. They are the two Speed Twisters, the Hydro and White Water Rafting.

I had to find where to pay. Then we paid and went through the slide gates. I ran up lots of stairs and at the top I waited for a bit.

I went on the White Water Raft and my tube floated off without me down the dark and scary slide. It took me a while to catch it, but I didn't get on it in the end. I went flying off the end of the tunnel and landed on my back. It stung a little.

I ran up the stairs again. This time I walked down the Hydro slide halfway. I walked back up, and then I jumped down and went quickly.

The Home Tutor feels that she has been supported by the Support Officer Learning Difficulties in addressing the needs that Bill has with reading and writing. Initially she had hoped that Bill's learning difficulties could be corrected using some kind of quick fix solution. After discussions with the Support Officer Learning Difficulties she has come to realise that even though it is important to be able to identify a learning difficulty it is more important to find ways to resolve it. And further to this the teachers and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties at the SOTA were an available resource to assist her to do this.

So it's (learning difficulties) not something that you treat as a problem that is unsolvable. This has to be solved. So really knowing what it is isn't such a big issue. It was about looking at how to solve it and I started to think more about getting him reading because he couldn't stay back a year.

The progress made with reading and writing so far has made a great difference to Bill's self-esteem and has helped him to feel more confident interacting in air sessions with his teacher and classmates. The Home Tutor feels that the air sessions in Years one to three required the students to do a lot of reading aloud by themselves and sometimes Bill found this so humiliating that he would cry. The range of air sessions now offered by SOTA has increased and includes French, Computer and Problem Solving. These are learning areas that Bill enjoys because they utilise fewer reading skills and as a result he has been able to experience further success with his schooling.

The testing completed by the teacher and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties showed that Bill was confusing vowels and consonant blends and the Home Tutor was introduced to a range of exercises and games that would assist Bill with this. Understanding that Bill is sociable by nature, the Home Tutor sometimes makes use of this characteristic to facilitate Bill's learning when they have visitors at the station.

Issue:
Home Tutors may neglect learning difficulties because they may feel that they don't have the expertise to resolve them.

Issue:
Teachers in SOTA settings have more difficulty ascertaining levels of stress that students may feel when asked to complete tasks during air lessons.

Issue:
It is important to encourage Home Tutors to use their initiative to create different learning

Because he's social I actually got him to sit on the lawn with a lot of my friends one day and they put things in a bucket for him and he'd have to pull them out and say the beginning sound, like - frog, 'fuh', and we'd talk about that. And we do a lot of social games in the car.

Over time Bill came to be less dependent on some of the support materials sent by the SOTA to assist him with his work and following on from the exercises given, the Home Tutor began to feel confident enough to devise her own activities to incorporate into the daily routine.

I'm much more confident to change things in school work than I used to be because before the SOLD came along I used to get my day's work and follow it religiously. And I was feeling very, very disenchanted because I hadn't missed any school and Bill wasn't succeeding. And I wasn't really addressing his problems, I was often addressing things that other children might have problems with that he was quite good at. So when the SOLD came out I realised I could change the curriculum. A year later... now, I realise that when we have to search for spelling words in a word puzzle, it's okay for me to find every second one. And it gives us more time to actually focus on him reading me something from the sports page in the newspaper and doing some reading.

The Home Tutor has found that she can use Spelling as a fun activity at the end of a block of work and she uses this as an opportunity to test words that Bill has learned from the Salisbury word list. She says that Bill enjoys seeing how many ticks he can accumulate on a page. After completing a foolscap page of words the Home Tutor is able to identify patterns in his errors and make him aware of the kinds of errors he is consistently making. As such insights into Bill's learning become apparent the Home Tutor is beginning to consult with Bill's teacher, David, so that adjustments can be made to the learning program if necessary.

One of the difficulties that the Home Tutor has in teaching her own child has to do with applying discipline consistently. She finds that she is no longer as strict about issues to do with schooling as she was when her two older sons were at home. On a day to day basis her expectations with regard to completed work also fluctuate and she is of the opinion that as long as the work gets done the daily timetable doesn't need to be too rigid. This change in attitude has come about as a consequence of her collaboration with the SOTA staff to solve Bill's learning difficulties.

I had to be strict, I had three boys in the classroom. There's a great sense of failure when you're not keeping up with the curriculum and you're getting behind. There's a failure on the Home Tutor's part when your child's failing. So you tend to think it's your fault and be stricter and stricter and become quite tense. I suppose since the interview with the SOLD and the new headmaster that the issue is the quality of work not the quantity. And since that pressure has been taken off I'm much happier in SOTA and so is Bill, and surprisingly we're keeping up quite well, thank you very much.

Since the Support Officer Learning Difficulties has been at the SOTA,

situations.

Issue:
Home Tutors need support to work to set in place successful learning programs.

Issue:

the Home Tutor has noticed a greater willingness on the part of teachers to modify set work or to assist Home Tutors to delete set activities. This effectively provides the Home Tutor and student with the time needed to work on a supplementary curriculum specific to the student's learning needs. She feels that previously it wasn't acceptable to modify set work by deleting activities and that whenever she supplemented the work given she was adding to the workload as it was a mandatory requirement that all set work be completed. This change of view is in keeping with the Curriculum Framework developmental approach to education, which was a topic discussed at the Home Tutors' camp earlier in the year.

As long as we're all achieving the outcomes there's been more flexibility and it's really, really great. Initially I thought I was being really daring to let Bill do these more practical things and call it school work. I hadn't actually thought about the idea of multiple intelligences before, so at camp I realised that there's probably a lot to value in Bill - in his ability to make things. It's all about confidence, isn't it?

The types of support offered to the Home Tutor by the teachers at the SOTA are varied. Bill's Home Tutor relies on David for a lot of telephone support and as a source of ideas for questions to do with the procedures for completing set work and the presentation required. She also relies upon David for a sense of what is normal academically and behaviourally for students of Bill's age. The isolated nature of distance education and lack of contact with students of a similar age group is a contributing factor to the limited perspective of many Home Tutors about what is 'normal'. However, when given the opportunity to gain an idea of the wide range of children that make up 'normal' classes and to observe teaching practices in a mainstream classroom this Home Tutor declined.

After the Home Tutor was initially interviewed by the Support Officer Learning Difficulties with regard to Bill's reading and writing difficulties she became more interested in finding a solution to his problems and enlisted the help of her mother, a retired remedial reading teacher. Bill's grandmother came to stay for a short period of time and did a lot of work with him. She felt that his reading would improve if he were encouraged to read out aloud to an audience. Similarly the Revise teachers, a group of retired teachers who will travel to isolated situations to provide support to students, have been utilised by the Freeman's and have helped Bill with his handwriting. The Home Tutor also relies on her friends to support Bill when they visit, by incorporating games and activities into their social occasions.

The Home Tutor has a range of expectations that she hopes Bill will attain as a student before he reaches secondary school and she describes her perceptions of her child's progress to date.

I'd hoped that Bill could sit down and write continually and fill at least the front and back of a page without being too distracted and in a reasonable amount of time. I expect him to be able to be organised, keep his things together, and work independently. I expect him to be able to read, and he's reading really well.

The Home Tutor has found the school has been supportive of her issues and concerns and has found the added support provided by the Support

Home Tutors have difficulty developing a sense of 'normal', and therefore of being able to develop teaching expectations appropriate to their

Issue:
Parents/ Home Tutors working in an isolated situation are often unable to recognise what constitutes a reading problem.

Officer Learning Difficulties of great value. She sees that the teacher provides support for issues to do with the day to day curriculum and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties provides continuity in that support from year to year. She sees herself as an integral part of her child's learning.

I wouldn't say he had a reading problem any more. I would say that he's a good reader. He doesn't have a problem. There's no problem left. It's amazing. So I'm really quite chuffed about that and that's a big weight off my shoulders. And I know that the SOLD - the whole process that we went through helped because the whole thing that we learnt and he learnt was 'Hey! I can solve this!' Because once he started the strategies he improved so rapidly and we were very praiseworthy. We said to him, "Gosh Bill, since your last test you have jumped six months in reading age!" Those sort of marked improvement type comments and he got very motivated to further impress us and he did. I'm really into him being a successful person in himself and I don't care if he's a vet's assistant, a cook, or an accountant. I want him to be a happy person and I want his learning to be joyful.

The Teacher

David's teaching qualification, obtained overseas, allowed him to teach in both primary and secondary schools and he taught a Grade Seven class for a year before leaving his country of origin to travel around the world. Following this David taught for three years at a high school in the south west of Western Australia before embarking on a year of further travels. Upon his return to Western Australia he became an Education Officer with the Commonwealth Government and in 1988 returned to teaching when he took a teaching position with the SOTA. David has been a member of staff there for the last three years. David's previous employment experiences, other than teaching, have given him insight into Aboriginal Education and disability training programs.

David views learning difficulties as a range of problems to do with curriculum that become apparent when students find schoolwork either too challenging or not challenging enough. He links this to the idea of benchmarks and achievement of learning levels as discussed in EDWA's Curriculum Framework document and notes the connection that this has with issues to do with minimum and maximum levels of student achievement.

David's own experiences with students with learning difficulties in the SOTA context have been limited to students whose difficulties appear comparatively less problematic. He has noticed those teachers and Home Tutors who were initially loath to adapt the set work produced by the SOTA for each year level have begun to change. He also notes that his own teaching practices have benefited from having a Support Officer Learning Difficulties on site.

From my point of view, particularly with my limited experience, having the SOLD has been invaluable to me. Not only has the SOLD been able to get me on the track of at least starting to have some idea of how to assess children if I

Issue:
Additional teachers with expertise in the area of learning difficulties are needed to assist teachers to provide for the individualised education requirements of

think they have difficulties but also providing me with resources, because that's what I really lack. You've identified some kind of weakness or skill deficit and need to find what resource can you provide which will address that difficulty. It was a huge bonus because it meant I didn't have to go to District Office and search out people that could help me.

students with learning difficulties in SOTA and mainstream situations.

David found that parents related better to the Support Officer Learning Difficulties accompanying him on home visits to assess students because she was viewed as a member of staff rather than a specialist from the District Office whom they regarded as an expert that they would never see again. This also assisted in the establishment of a rapport between home and school.

The Support Officer Learning Difficulties's addition to the staff at the SOTA was, according to David, one that needed to be handled with sensitivity. Some of the staff were experienced teachers and had been accustomed to working with students with learning difficulties in a manner which they felt had been satisfactory, given the constraints that they worked under. Initially it had not been acceptable for teachers to modify the SOTA's set work to any great degree, but over time this has changed and there is now more flexibility for teachers in this regard. Hence the teachers have become more receptive to suggestions that build on the work previously done to identify students learning difficulties and to establish programs that "get to the nut of the issue".

David discusses each of the stakeholder's roles in the New Chidley model and sees the Principal's role as one of trying to provide as much regular schooling to SOTA students as possible. This includes addressing any needs that particular students may have by tapping into expertise and resources as they are needed and at the same time providing the parents with an understanding of their child's achievement in the broader educational picture. He also sees the Principal along with the Support Officer Learning Difficulties as having an overall view of what is happening for students with learning difficulties and being responsible for the continuity of their learning programs.

Issue:
The Principal and SOLD manage continuity of learning programs from year to year.

The teacher is required to identify student needs, follow up on parental concerns and follow through on the delivery of appropriate education plans.

As a teacher you're the focal point - it's your responsibility to liaise with the stakeholders in the whole process. With the SOLD being here it's a great bonus for me because I've got some place to go to and I think there's scope for everyone getting together as a group. Now that some of us have started doing IEPs we need to start sharing that information among ourselves and that hasn't happened yet. But I think that's the next step we've got to make as a staff because otherwise the SOLD's position is still seen to be like a specialist. We need to be taking more responsibility for sharing our ideas because nobody's the fount of all knowledge. And as you get different problems coming up you find different solutions for them and when you're looking for resources and have found some that work really well for you, someone else might be able to use them also.

The Home Tutor, whether parent or employee, needs to be aware of how to implement the Individual Education Plans designed and needs to be able to cooperate with the teaching staff in monitoring and evaluating the progress made. Home Tutors need to understand that the adaptation of their student's learning plan is designed to assist the student's learning and that teaching to individual need is of utmost importance.

Home Tutors need to see this as a help and that the work is still schoolwork and it's things that they can have success in. And so to some degree we're trying to educate them away from - 'Well, are they in Year 3 really?' This ties in to the Curriculum Framework, which looks at individuals rather than year levels.

The students at the SOTA are open to discussion about any learning problems that they may have and David sees that such self-awareness helps them to be involved in the process of sorting out their own difficulties

David illustrates the interactive process of the stakeholders, starting with the teacher who at the beginning of each term sends off a dispatch of materials to the student and Home Tutor. David prefers to send a cover note with these materials stating what it is that will be covered in the sets and how they have been modified for the student. He includes an idea of the expectations that he has for the term and what will be covered in the air lessons. After the initial dispatch David maintains regular contact with the Home Tutors by phone and encourages them to ring him whenever they need. Most of David's students live nearby and usually come into town once a week and so he is able to see them fairly frequently.

Issue:
Home Tutors and parents confidence in themselves to do the job.

If a learning difficulty has been identified by the Home Tutor, parent or teaching staff an assessment is organised for the student concerned. Initially David lacked experience in this and as a part of his own professional development he consults with the Support Officer Learning Difficulties in the selection and use of appropriate assessment tools. As a consequence he is able to make use of a greater number of observations and tests himself.

Following the initial assessment the teacher and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties consider how a student's workload will be modified. Students with more complex difficulties will have Individual Education Plans developed specifically to meet their needs, while those with less complicated problems might have their learning requirements met by working from modified or supplemented set work. David has known how to modify set work but with the Support Officer Learning Difficulties's help has been learning how to devise Individual Education Plans and to select supplementary materials appropriate to the student's learning needs.

The Home Tutor is also consulted in the planning process and implements any devised plan of work. Therefore, not only does the teacher need to construct an Individual Education Plan that meets the student's learning needs, but they also need to take into account the Home Tutor's abilities to deliver the program. Consideration needs to be given to the Home Tutor's educational background and the time that they will need to commit to the delivery of the program.

Issue:
Home Tutor's and parents' confidence in themselves to do the job.

The parent (Home Tutor) being able to carry out the IEP or

modified set work is the biggest issue in the SOTA context. You have to make sure that the student's able to do the work but also if they can try to do most of it themselves. So it's very structured so that they're able to do it if mum isn't around.

After setting up the student's program the teacher and the Home Tutor monitor the progress made to ensure that the objectives are met and improvements made when necessary. David sees monitoring and evaluating as an ongoing part of the process, with a particular focus given to evaluation at the end of each term.

SOTA students in this district have reasonable access to the services of professionals such as speech therapists, psychologists and occupational therapists. Usually parents from the SOTA need only contact the Support Officer Learning Difficulties or their child's teacher, who will then set up an appointment with the appropriate service and provide the necessary background information. The Support Officer Learning Difficulties in this case has built up a rapport with the specialists at the District Office so that they have an understanding of the way the SOTA operates and she has taken it upon herself to co-ordinate and contact the appropriate services as required.

We had one family who has left now, and they were only about an hour out of town but mum didn't drive and their young one needed a speech pathologist and we'd set up appointments but most of them were missed. The distance factor is an issue, but also what can people do in a one off session. Or they may feel a bit intimidated - 'I've got this expert saying I need to do this and this, and even if they tell me what to do I might not be able to do it in spite of the teacher and SOLD being there to help.' Lifestyle is also an issue. Some parents may choose to opt back into the government school system to access resources and some may choose not to or may not be able to.

David sees the collaboration of staff as important in a small school like the SOTA and points out that, depending on personalities, it is also easy to remain involved with your own group of students and parents and not share the results of work done successfully with students at risk. He sees that the staff has come to realise that there are a variety of ways to further students' learning.

All of us have come to the recognition that there are other things that we can do to meet children's needs and to some degree the programs are a lot more targeted and of a lot more benefit. In the past they were somewhat cosmetic, like we'd delete some work out of the sets and maybe provide some supplementary material but that was probably as far as it would go - particularly from Year 3 up. Not really getting to the nitty gritty. Providing us with the expertise to identify students and assess them when they start off at SOTA is really good. So right away you can start to work with them.

The modified programs and Individual Education Plans used by the Home Tutors and students assists them to see that there are alternative ways of working with the learning difficulties that have been identified

Issue:

To be effective, specialists may need to be visited on a regular basis.

Issue:

Lifestyle choices may prevent students having access to specialist attention.

Issue:

The involvement of

and that these alternatives can lead to possible solutions to their problems. Rather than feeling thwarted and frustrated by the set work the student and Home Tutor are able to achieve success and therefore to gain a sense of energy and enthusiasm for the tasks specially constructed according to student's needs. However, the success of any program is dependent upon the interest and motivation of the Home Tutor.

In the case of one particular family that was at the SOTA last year, the resources were provided, the program was there. Mum said she understood the program, which was fairly straight forward, it was structured, and there was one hell of a lot of work put into it, but it just wasn't done. So when push came to shove for whatever reason mum felt that she couldn't do it or whatever. I don't know how you actually get around that. So if you can't get past your Home Tutor you're not going to get to the kid anyway. But you don't have to give away the game, you still need to be offering the support. It becomes evident that you have to be working with the Home Tutor as well as the student. You can work with the Home Tutor and there might be things that she needs to do which aren't being done, so what do you do then? You go back and you try again, and you try again, and you try again.

When David returned to teaching he went to as many professional development sessions at the District Office as he could so that he could acquaint himself with current policy and teaching practice. He felt that most of these sessions were pertinent to general classroom practitioners and that although some of this had application to teaching in the SOTA context there was a lack of available professional development that dealt specifically with teaching students via a Home Tutor and at a distance. Consequently he views the easy access to the Support Officer Learning Difficulties as invaluable and a resource that he frequently refers to in his daily teaching practice. He sees that there is a need for the Support Officer Learning Difficulties to be able to provide effective professional development to suit a range of teacher needs.

I think the SOLD has to be a bit of a diplomat and be able to work with all types of personalities and offer expertise and professional development that's not threatening. An attitude of 'I'm not the expert, let's figure it out together.' Whereas it would be fairly easy to come in and say, 'Well, this is the way it's done.' Or, 'This is the way I did it.'

Aspects of the New Chidley Model that David would like to see improved centre around professional development. He feels that to utilise the SUPPORT OFFICER LEARNING DIFFICULTIES further it would be helpful to increase the professional development available to the staff particularly in the areas of student assessment and working with the Curriculum Framework. He also suggested that mini-camps could be run for parents and Home Tutors out on the stations so that small groups of parents could meet together more regularly to work through issues relevant to their teaching practice.

The issue of continuity of programs for students at educational risk is also raised. David thinks that it is tremendous that there is someone in the school who can oversee such programs to provide continuity and resources and attend to all the needs associated with a student's learning

the Home Tutor is vital to the successful delivery of an IEP.

Issue: Professional development is necessary for Home Tutors and teachers if programs set in place are to be successful.

Issue: The need for further systemic support in the provision of resources and the setting up of an infrastructure to provide for students at educational risk.

difficulties. He acknowledges the difficulty that most teachers have in trying to meet such needs as they maintain the requirements of a normal class workload.

I guess continuity is the issue everywhere. Even if you do an IEP and send that off to the next school you don't know whether that's going to be implemented or if anyone is going to have the time to do it.

Cathy Holmes

aged 10 years

Introduction

Cathy Holmes and her parents live in Bluegrass, which is an old salt mine in rural Western Australia. Except for one other mine employee they are the only people who live there. Bluegrass is approximately an hour and a half from the country town in which the School of the Air (SOTA) is situated. Once a week when the Holmes family goes into town Cathy participates in air lessons with her teacher, David, at the School of the Air. Cathy has three older siblings who live in the town.

The family's accommodation used to be the main dining quarters when the mine was fully operational. There are several rooms that come off the dining room, one of which has been converted into Cathy's classroom. The room provides ample storage space as well as a bench work area and it also has the capacity to display teaching materials. Cathy easily accesses the computer and radio to complete her computer lessons.

Cathy is in Year 5 this year, her teacher is David and her mother Laura is her Home Tutor. Up until the end of term three in 1999, Cathy attended a mainstream primary school in the town. At the beginning of term four Cathy's parents moved a distance out of the town to live and work and so she became a student at the School of the Air. The areas of learning that Cathy has some difficulty in are reading comprehension and the number strand in mathematics. A contributing factor to Cathy's learning difficulties is that both her parents are working at the old mine and for the majority of the time she is left to cope with her school work on her own. Ms Harris has indicated that both she and her husband are finding it difficult to motivate Cathy to stay on task when they are not at home. When she does have difficulties with her work Cathy is able to make contact with David by phone. Due to the remote location of the mine site, the family has to use a satellite phone rather than a landline phone and as a consequence there is no facility for a fax to reinforce Cathy's communication with the school. Even though Cathy is able to attend air lessons with David at the School of the Air she often forgets to bring all of her work with her and consequently doesn't take full advantage of this learning opportunity.

Cathy has spent all of her primary school years in mainstream schools and in Year Four moved away from the town necessitating her placement in the School of the Air. As a consequence her mother, Laura Harris is very new to the role of Home Tutor.

Year Four, term four

As a result of assessments completed in August of 1999, Cathy's teacher developed an Individual Education Plan for her in the areas of reading and maths. The assessment given in Maths showed that Cathy had difficulty with number stories for all operations, identifying fractions, higher multiplication factors, complex visual patterns and subtraction

with regrouping.

An analysis of the Neale Spelling assessment showed that Cathy needed more work on her final blends, syllabification, use of the silent 'e' and other silent letters, while her writing sample showed that her writing appeared to be disjointed and lacked a sense of flow. It also appeared that Cathy was able to use simple punctuation in her story writing, although she needed to learn to edit her work independently.

The Neale Reading analysis showed that Cathy's reading rate and reading accuracy were age level appropriate, but the level of comprehension that she achieved in this assessment was of some concern to her teachers, being a year and five months lower than her chronological age.

Year Five

In Year Five David became Cathy's teacher and at the start of the first term David and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties went out on a Home Visit to the Harris/ Holmes residence. The purpose of the visit was to follow up on the issues to do with Cathy's learning in the areas of maths and spelling as outlined by her Year Four teacher in the end of year handover notes. This also provided an opportunity for David and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties to discuss any concerns that Cathy and the Home Tutor might be having with regard to the School of the Air set work and the school generally.

After an interview with the Home Tutor, David and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties proposed a modified program developed from the set work that Cathy was being asked to complete. The Home Tutor responded positively to this, keen to work on a program that catered to her daughter's interests and needs.

Some of the issues to do with Cathy's learning that were identified were as much to do with classroom management and organisation as they were to do with Cathy's needs in curriculum areas. The Home Tutor expressed concern about the disarray in Cathy's work area and David and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties provided some suggestions as to how the set materials could be better organised. David also helped Cathy to organise her desk so that she could function more efficiently when she was doing her schoolwork. Further discussions with the Home Tutor highlighted the need for a daily timetable that both Cathy and her Home Tutor could work by and another list that outlined specific responsibilities that Cathy was obliged to maintain. David, with the Home Tutor's and Cathy's input constructed these documents and they became the basis for managing Cathy's learning. David also organised for Cathy and the Home Tutor to ring him with any concerns that they might have and he in turn would contact them weekly to check progress. At that point in time Cathy was up to date with her work.

In the second term David and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties went on a Home Visit to see how Cathy and the Home Tutor were progressing. Issues to do with the lack of work being submitted to David needed to be addressed and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties needed to complete Maths testing for school management purposes.

Issue:
To work successfully as a School of the Air student, both Home Tutor and student need to be well organised.

In discussions with the Home Tutor, David found that due to work and home maker responsibilities she was unable to do much tutoring and that in turn Cathy was left to her own devices for long periods of time. Both the Home Tutor and Cathy mentioned that in spite of the modifications they were finding the Language set work difficult and that some of the topics covered were of little interest to Cathy. Further to this, the testing in Maths indicated that Cathy required remediation in the areas of Space and Number.

In consultation with the Support Officer Learning Difficulties, David developed an Individual Education Plan based on the topics of crystals and birds, which were of interest to Cathy. The Home Tutor was enthusiastic about this idea because she hoped that it would mean that Cathy might be able to work independently and Cathy felt that she would be more interested and motivated to complete the work set. David then set about compiling an Individual Education Plan that was very structured, with the initial programs of work being very simplistic in approach to ensure that Cathy would be able to complete all of the tasks.

An example of brainstorming outline and responsibilities are shown below.

Issue:
Students with learning difficulties in the SOTA context are dependent upon their Home Tutors to provide the support that they need in order to make progress with their learning. Therefore, this relationship has a direct impact on how these learning difficulties are resolved and the time taken to do so.

Everybody was delegated jobs for the new program.

Cathy

- ◆ Research and complete contract
- ◆ Contact school if she needs to ask questions
- ◆ Talk to Mum and Dad the night before about what she will be doing
- ◆ Work together with Mr.C on their contract

David

- ◆ Devise program after Cyona's input
- ◆ Draw up a learning contract for them both
- ◆ Locate appropriate resources
- ◆ Focal points in the area of project writing, spelling and mathematics

SO/LD

- ◆ Work alongside Mr.C when devising program
- ◆ Assist with contract
- ◆ Help locate resources
- ◆ Find a display book for presentation of Cyona's projects

Home Tutor

- ◆ Set aside a time to talk about what Cyona will be doing the night before
- ◆ Visit library when in town

Visit Observations

Together we brainstormed ideas for a modified program based around Cyona's interest and prior knowledge.

Cyona expressed that she was really interested in the following things;

- ◆ Cooking
- ◆ Growing plants
- ◆ Crystals
- ◆ Insects
- ◆ Animals in the bush
- ◆ Drawing and making things

These are some of the ideas as a result of the brainstorm

Mice	Birds	African jungle	Rabbits (wild & domestic)
		Animals	
Bulls		Cows	Scorpions
Kangaroos	Emus		Lizards & snakes

- ◆ What do animals eat?
- ◆ What they do?
- ◆ What they look like?
- ◆ Where do they live?
- ◆ Diseases
- ◆ Biggest animal in the world

Ways of recording information- tapa record, pictures, computer, write, video

Crystals

- ◆ Where do they come from?
- ◆ Cyona wants to grow one
- ◆ How long do they grow?
- ◆ Different types, shapes
- ◆ How do they grow?
- ◆ Where are they found?
- ◆ How are they formed?

Growing Plants

- Experiments
- Composting
- Cooking vegetables
- Worm farms
- How do flowers grow?
- Time frame
- Vegetables & bulbs

Cooking

- ◆ Different tasks required
- ◆ How she has done the cooking-procedure writing
- ◆ Making icecream
- ◆ Making cakes

In spite of the arrangements made in the first term the organisation of Cathy's schoolroom and the timetable constructed were in disarray. Consequently all the learning materials were brought into the schoolroom and the area was tidied up and organised once more and Cathy was supervised by the Support Officer Learning Difficulties to draw up her own timetable.

It was also arranged for David to contact Cathy by phone once a day to confirm specifically which work had been completed and to provide support in areas where Cathy needed help. This appeared to work well for Cathy and she was able to maintain her enthusiasm for her learning.

Maths resources that could help to address areas of weakness identified in the Maths testing were placed on order and a remediation program

was created for Cathy, using those resources.

The Student

From a curriculum perspective Cathy considers herself to be good at Language, reading the books that come with the set work, Art and Computer. She particularly likes to write using the computer and to use coloured text and drawings to enhance her work. Cathy also likes using the computer to play games on CD-ROM such as the Maths problem solving game 'Outnumbered.' Cathy perceives that she is good at the learning areas of Art, Reading and Computer because she 'does them a lot' and she is able to evaluate her own performance. She also evaluates the standard of a piece of work by its neatness.

I know I'm good at something and not so good at another because sometimes I do it neat and sometimes I do it bad.

Cathy defines reading as, 'When you read a book and you read books a lot'. She believes that we read for fun, for school, to be able to do things in everyday life and to 'help our brain'. The kinds of things that we read are books, newspapers and magazines. Similarly Cathy links writing to functional daily practices.

You need to learn to write so when you get a job and you have to do a letter or something, or if someone rang for someone and they weren't there you have to write a message. If you want a job and you couldn't write you wouldn't get the job because you couldn't write.

Cathy was unable to explain the kinds of books that might be difficult for her to read other than those with small print or in another language. She doesn't appear to be aware of any particular ways of independently selecting a book to ensure that it is appropriate to her level of comprehension. Asking someone to read an unknown word to her, and using a dictionary or computer to look up words are reading strategies that Cathy was able to talk about.

Apart from her Handwriting Cathy seemed unable to articulate what it was about her reading and writing that was problematic for her or what sort of help she might need to become a more independent reader and writer.

I'm really good at my Handwriting but I'd still like help with that.

Similarly, with Maths Cathy is able to recognise that she does have some difficulties but was unable to say clearly which aspects of her program she found hard to do.

The issues to do with classroom and personal organisation don't appear to be as much of a problem for Cathy as they do for her Home Tutor. Cathy feels she manages the organisation of her books and classroom materials herself with a little help from her Home Tutor. The set work sent from the School of the Air is usually left in the box that it arrives in until it is needed, rather than being organized in the classroom

environment.

Cathy identifies the Home Tutor and her teacher, David as being the two most likely people to help her with her learning. She recognises that David helps her if she is 'stuck' with an aspect of her work and she accesses that help by phoning him or talking to him over the radio. Cathy wasn't sure if she was doing the same set work as the other students in her class, but she was able to show some enthusiasm for the her latest Individual Education Plan as it focused on her areas of interest.

Because it's got all animals and cooking and things that I need to know.

Cathy says that she is able to work some things out for herself in Maths by using a calculator. In her language work she sometimes rereads her work to see if it makes sense.

Cathy was very unsure how to evaluate her own learning and was unable to say how she could tell if her reading had improved, writing or spelling. She felt David might know if she had improved when she rang him or took her work to him to mark. She is aware that the contract that she has signed for her Individual Education Plan is to help her to take responsibility for completing the work that has been set, but she doesn't appear to grasp the significance of this.

The Home Tutor

Laura is Cathy's mother and Home Tutor. Laura considers her daughter Cathy to be very intelligent, having many strengths that are not represented in the work that she is presently producing. She identifies Cathy's areas of interest as anything to do with animals or science and observes that she loves to be out in the bush.

She looks for insects, animals, everything that moves - she's watching them, she's studying them. Or she goes down the back here and looks for crystals and rocks. If she's found a crystal she'll look it up and check out why and how it's made. She talks about that. One of her strengths is that she is verbal.

The Home Tutor notes that Cathy doesn't enjoy her schoolwork and that she has difficulty with Maths and some areas of Language and in particular with her writing.

As she's writing she's thinking ahead of what she's writing and she gets totally confused. She knows what she wants to put down on paper but she's too far ahead of her writing itself.

The Home Tutor feels that Cathy's teacher David and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties are addressing the concerns that she has about Cathy's learning. David has spoken to Cathy at length about her work and sets her off on the right track, but Cathy finds this difficult to sustain without her Home Tutor's ongoing assistance.

David has spoken to her (Cathy) quite a few times about

Issue:
Students in a School of the Air context may not realize they have learning difficulties if they have no other students to whom they can compare themselves.

Issue:
Inexperienced Home Tutors lack teaching strategies and require professional development.

what she's doing but nothing seems to be happening on her part yet. Twice now we've tried different programs with her. She knows, but she won't put them into place herself. She's been spoken to on the day that the programs have been developed. She's been shown how to go about it and what to do. And if she has a problem she's got to ring David. She used to do that quite regularly but since I haven't been able to spend a lot of time with her she's kind of cut back on it for some reason. I don't know whether it's because she's got so far behind now and she's got that 'Oh, I shouldn't ring because I haven't done this work.'

Cathy's mother/home tutor perceives that the programs devised were appropriate for Cathy's learning needs, but were not completed because Cathy does not want her mother to go to work.

She doesn't like me going to work, which can't be helped. So I've got to turn her around and say, 'You've got to do this (set work) in a certain amount of time, otherwise you'll get behind again.'

When Cathy's parents return home from work they make attempts to look over her completed work. Cathy's mother finds this less than satisfactory and has realised that she needs to become involved in finding a solution to Cathy's schooling problems.

She's getting time (with me) but as soon as we get home she's full of questions about what we've done at work and what's been happening with the animals in the bush. If she's got a problem we'll go through it, but I think she loses it by the time she comes back to it tomorrow or the next morning. So it's both of us really that have actually got to get together and sort something out for her.

Laura began working as Cathy's Home Tutor seven months ago and as a consequence has become more aware of Cathy's learning style and capabilities. Laura perceives a difference between what has been reported to her about Cathy's levels of school achievement and what she is actually capable of doing.

The reports she was been getting at school (mainstream) have said that she's good at this and that and I've noticed the total opposite. Compared to the reports that I've received, what I'm seeing here is just not at that level.

Laura's understanding of how children learn has developed since she became a Home Tutor and she sees herself as learning alongside her daughter. Her role as Home Tutor provides a perspective of her child's learning that she has previously not noticed.

You're seeing the results of what she's done right in front of you - the mistakes and the good stuff.

Issue:

The Home Tutor's own levels of education have a direct influence on their ability to work with students, particularly those having learning difficulties.

Issue:

The parent's motivation to be a Home Tutor can change once they take on the role.

Issue:

Inclination to work with one's own child as a Home Tutor.

The Home Tutoring role is problematic for Laura and she finds it difficult to fit her job and everything else in the family's life around Cathy's schooling, although she values the support she has received from Cathy's teacher David and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties. As Cathy has to do much of her work alone, she has been encouraged to miss out those parts of her set work that she finds too difficult and 'go on to the next page' until her parents can help her. By the time her parents are able to help her, Cathy has usually decided that she is unable to do the set tasks and gives up making any effort to do so. Over a period of time this has resulted in very little set work being sent in to David and a tension developing in the relationship between Home Tutor and student. This situation is compounded each day that Cathy works alone. Laura feels that Cathy should be able to complete the level of work that has been set in her Individual Education Plan but the fact that she chooses not to, is seen as an attempt to seek her mother's attention. When Laura does work with Cathy she often finds it difficult to support her.

I have to go out of the room. I know she can do what's in front of her and I get frustrated because she tries to say she can't do it and I know she can. That's when I walk out of the room before I start screaming at her. She will not work things out for herself. She knows it but she'll just try me in certain areas for the reaction. I'll say 'Cathy, you know what it is.' And then she'll just look at me and you can see what she's up to straight away and I've got to get out of the room. And she'll have the answer there when I come back.

Laura sees that in spite of the support that she receives from the staff at the School of the Air the solution to the problems relating to Cathy's learning lie in the kind of relationship that exists between Home Tutor and student. She feels sure that should a person other than herself be tutoring, Cathy would not experience the same kinds of frustrations.

We access the school's help over the phone usually but I come into the school when I can. Usually it's a quick five minutes in the door and out again. If we're in town Cathy can stay in the school and do some work with David. That's really good, she comes back really motivated when she's been in and done her air lessons, she's totally different. It's really encouraging to see her that way. After being in the bush and then she's playing these games with me and then she goes in and she knows the work. It's so frustrating.

When Laura reflects on the kind of feedback that she has given David about Cathy's work she feels that she probably has focused negatively on Cathy's behaviour rather than the positive aspects of the work that she has produced.

A lot of things she's done have been great - absolutely beautiful work. She'll do really good and then all of a sudden it's out the door. Good work in drawing, language - depending on what it is and depending on the day. If she clicks in straight away to what's happening she'll get right into it, but if she doesn't the book will get put away.

Laura feels confident to approach David with any educational concerns

Issue:

Parents do not necessarily consider their Home Tutoring role to be a priority.

Issue:

The student's learning is dependent on the quality of the Home tutor/student relationship.

that she might have and finds that he is responsive and provides immediate feedback to any issues she raises. Even though she feels she is an important part of Cathy's learning Laura also feels that she is failing her at present because she is ultimately responsible for any work that Cathy is not finishing. However, there have been many positive experiences that Laura has encountered as Cathy's Home Tutor and most of these relate to the pleasure of seeing a child achieve success in the activities that they set out to master.

She's done some beautiful work and seeing the expression on her face when she knows she's done really well. She's done drawing and explained things to me instead of putting things down on paper and that reaction that I get from her is great. She loves being on the radio because she loves getting that input from her teacher and it's just a totally different environment for her because she's got one on one. And hearing the other kids at the same time has been great.

Laura expects Cathy to be able to read for knowledge and pleasure before she reaches secondary school and to have a good general knowledge. She would also like her to have more confidence in Number in Maths and to have a working knowledge of all the times tables and be able to use them to problem solve in real life situations.

Sally Connolly

aged 9 years

Introduction

Sally lives with her mother and father and three-year-old sister, Robyn, at Rowlands on a railway line in outback Australia. The countryside around Rowlands is arid and features the red dust and dirt characteristic of Western Australia's desert areas. Once a pleasant little town, Rowlands was used as an outpost to accommodate railway staff. Now there are few people living there. The train continues to pass through three times a week and delivers the mail each Wednesday for Rowlands and the surrounding stations.

Today Rowlands has an unkempt air about it and resembles a deserted ghost town with dilapidated and deteriorating buildings. Only a few houses remain and, apart from the three houses that are occupied, most of these are vacant. The Connollys reside in one house while the other two are used occasionally by railway employees and a kangaroo shooter.

A large country town is the closest service centre to Rowlands and is visited by the Connollys on a regular basis. Occasionally the family makes the four to five hour trip to the south coast for recreational fishing and holidaying. The Connollys have resided in Rowlands for the past two and a half years.

Mr. Connolly, Sally's father, was educated in the eastern states and completed an apprenticeship as a mechanical fitter. He works full-time in this capacity at the local limestone mine and as a consequence leaves home early in the morning and doesn't return until late in the evening. Sally's mother, Mrs. Connolly works full-time as Sally's Home Tutor and also spends about an hour each day sorting the mail for the local area. Mrs. Connolly completed Year Eleven at secondary school in the eastern states before attending a six-week course at a business college. Both Mr. and Mrs. Connolly were previously married and Mr. Connolly's children from his first marriage live with their mother. Sally and Robyn are Mr. and Mrs. Connolly's children.

The Connollys have converted one of their three bedrooms into a schoolroom. This space is also used for storage of the parcels and mail that Mrs Connolly deals with on a daily basis. In one corner of the room there is a desk set up for Sally to work at and alongside of this pigeonhole shelving is used to organize her learning materials. The radio and computer are also set up in this room. There is no evidence of environmental print or of display charts to assist Sally's learning. Reading books are located in the lounge room. Jane is Sally's teacher.

Pre-primary

Mrs. Connolly has been Sally's Home Tutor since she began school at the School of the Air (SOTA) in 1996. In her Pre-primary year it was observed that Sally was having difficulty pronouncing her words and

Issue:
Support from
parent to
repeat.

formulating sentences. To add to this she tended to behave in an erratic fashion and these combined factors prompted her Pre-primary teacher, to seek Mr. and Mrs. Connolly's permission to obtain professional assessment for Sally. Sally's records indicate that she was initially assessed by a Speech Pathologist in April 1996. Following this and further school assessments and after consultation with her parents, it was decided that Sally would benefit from repeating Pre-primary the following year.

In her second year of Pre-primary Sally was put onto an Individualised Education Program (IEP) which included work with a Speech Therapist. In April of that year the School Speech Pathology Service, through the District Education Office, assessed Sally and provided an Assessment Report to Sally's teacher and her parents. This assessment reported on two main areas of speech development that included Sound Development and Language Development. The area of Language Development was broken down further into Receptive Language and Expressive Language.

Issue:
Availability of specialist services to students in isolated situations.

Sound Development refers to the child's ability to pronounce sounds in words. For this assessment the Speech Therapist reported that:

Sally's speech has developed a great deal since her last assessment in April 1996. She does still have difficulty with a few words and also with sequencing of the sounds in longer words. She substitutes a 't' for a 'ch' sound, a 'b' for a 'v' sound and a 'f' for a 'th' sound.

In the area of Language Development, Receptive Language refers to the child's ability to understand language and in the assessment of comprehension speech therapists are interested in the child's ability to answer complex questions and to follow instructions. For this assessment the Speech Therapist reported that:

Sally's receptive vocabulary is delayed for her age. She also had difficulty with more complex questions, such as those that ask 'why', and 'what if', and 'how'. Her receptive language skills have improved since the last assessment but are still delayed for her age.

Expressive Language assessment looks at how the child expresses him/herself. This assessment looks not only at the grammar and sentence construction that the child uses, but also at his/her ability to tell stories and present information in a logical order. For this assessment the Speech Therapist reported that:

Sally is able to express a great deal of information in her sentences, but her grammatical skills are poor. She is using larger, more complex sentences than she did in the previous assessment, but these are often poorly structured. Her narrative retell was logically presented, with much of the information included. Once again the grammar of her sentences was delayed. We will need to work more specifically on grammar and sentence structure.

The Speech Therapist provided Sally's teacher and Mrs Connolly with guidelines for the speech areas that needed to be focused upon. Each week Sally had speech therapy lessons on air with her teacher that

Issue:
Time-consuming

incorporated as many games and fun activities as possible. The focus of these sessions initially was on Speech, Receptive and Expressive Language, and Metalinguistic Skills. The teachers planned and implemented lessons specific to Sally's speech needs and reported back to the Speech Therapist as Sally progressed.

interaction, requiring one-on-one support.

Each fortnight Sally's teacher faxed the Home Tutor a plan of activities to use during the lesson. The plan was faxed a few days prior to the lesson to allow time for the Home Tutor to practise the activities with Sally. Each new lesson would consolidate tasks from previous lessons and add new knowledge and tasks. This interaction led Sally's teacher to believe that Sally needed time to consolidate new tasks and usually new lessons would be repeated the following week.

Sally worked on an IEP that incorporated her Speech Lessons and this type of programming was to become one of the main components of Sally's school education. The program was produced collaboratively by Sally's Speech Therapist, her Pre-primary teacher, her Home Tutor and the Itinerant Teacher, a position no longer employed by EDWA. The areas of learning targeted by the program were Sally's speech and her air session behaviour.

Issue:
Difficulty of addressing behavioural needs when standards differ between home and school.

Previously, it had been noted that Sally was capable of completing air session activities properly but that she regularly displayed attention-seeking behaviour and was often disobedient and disruptive. She was able to understand questions and instructions although she was slow to respond or didn't respond appropriately. In answering questions she tended to respond with just the content words needed, omitting the sentence structure and syntax. For example she would say, 'Pig roll mud', instead of, 'The pig rolled in the mud'. It was also noted that Sally could use the radio independently when given the opportunity and that she had quite good manipulative skills.

Consequently this IEP set out to assist Sally to improve her air session behaviour, to respond appropriately to questions and instructions, to participate in songs and rhymes, to begin to develop independent work habits, and to participate in the speech program prepared by the Speech Therapist. Several strategies were put in place to achieve these objectives. The activities set out by the Speech Therapist were sent to the Home Tutor in sections that she could cope with, so that she didn't become overloaded with too many materials. This work was also used to build a rapport between Sally's Home Tutor and teacher and to promote interaction and feedback opportunities.

Issue:
The development of a good rapport between teacher and Home Tutor (parent) is of utmost importance.

Sally was to be involved in an extra air session each Tuesday. This session was completed with Sally only, and input from the Home Tutor was discouraged, giving the teacher a chance to observe the kinds of behaviours that working alone with Sally would bring about. This was also an opportunity for her teacher to encourage Sally to begin to work independently. The content of these sessions was taken from speech activities developed by the speech therapist and oral language activities developed by the teacher.

Issue:
The teacher's workload increases.

A sticker-eating monster was introduced to encourage positive behaviour and appropriate responses from Sally. This was actually used with the whole class but was directed at Sally's needs in order to improve her air session behaviour. The Home Tutor was also encouraged to implement a

Issue:
The teacher needs a developed

consistent behaviour modification program for Sally when she was completing schoolwork so that Sally could be helped to understand that appropriate behaviour was required at school.

An on-going monitoring and evaluation plan was a part of Sally's IEP. The weekly air lessons provided regular opportunities to monitor her air session behaviour and when necessary Sally's teacher made phone calls to the Home Tutor to follow up the lessons. The teacher carefully monitored Sally's progress through the program outlined by the speech therapist and organised a follow-up visit at the Sports Camp.

Year One

The following year, Sally's education program continued to be provided collaboratively by her mother Mrs Connolly as Home Tutor, her teacher, and the Support Officer-Learning Difficulties in conjunction with agencies external to the school such as the Speech Therapist and School Psychologist.

The Support Officer Learning Difficulties was brought into the School of the Air to assist in the collaborative delivery of education programs to students experiencing learning difficulties and in particular to provide support within the school context to the teachers, parents and Home Tutors of these students. This role also ensures a co-ordinated approach to the management of each student's case through liaison and collaboration with all the stakeholders involved. In the school context these stakeholders include the student, the Home Tutor, the parents, the teacher, the Support Officer Learning Difficulties and the Principal. Stakeholders external to the school situation, such as Speech Therapists and Psychologists, are included and in each case their support is co-ordinated by the Support Officer Learning Difficulties.

In Year One Sally's education program continued to provide her with the Speech lessons that she needed as well as assisting her to develop behaviours that would help her to learn and to work independently. In particular her IEP was concerned with the provision of appropriate speech materials and the modification of set work. Her teachers were also concerned that in spite of the interventions already in place Sally was not making rapid progress and psychological assessment was conducted to ascertain the teaching practices most appropriate to her learning style. While Sally's teacher focused on working with Sally and the Home Tutor, the Support Officer Learning Difficulties took steps to help the parents refer for a psychologist's assessment of Sally and on an on-going basis reviewed and acquired teaching resources appropriate to Sally's particular speech requirements. The teacher in the on-going contact notes made a record of Sally's progress:

Term 3, '98. Contacted Mrs C. Made various calls during the term re speech therapy program and assessment at District Office by Speech Therapist in Week 8. Therapy going well at home, doing for ten minutes every day.

Week 7, Term 4. Contacted Mrs C. Sally was having difficulty saying 'oi'. Have sent her an 'oi' speech program.

understanding of the individual child's motivational factors.
Issue:
Regular contact is vital between teacher and Home Tutor for student progress to be achieved.

Issue:
The collaborative process is dependent upon regular stakeholder communication and the maintenance of detailed records.

Term 1. Week 1, 1999. Mrs C. rang to let me know that Sally is beginning to make progress with targeted 'oi' sound.

Term 1, Week 2. Contacted Mrs C., happy to go ahead and continue with pre-designated remedial materials. Visiting in Week 7, Term 1, '99, will reassess then.

As Sally began working on the Year One set work sent out by the School of the Air each fortnight it became apparent to her teacher that this work would need to be modified to suit Sally's needs. In collaboration with the Home Tutor and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties the teacher arranged for this to happen. Once the sets had been modified the teacher and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties went out to Rowlands on a home visit to discuss with the Home Tutor how the modified sets could be used and to show her some teaching strategies that would assist her when using the sets with Sally. The Home Tutor was then required to assist in the modification of Sally's set work and to provide frequent feedback to the teacher with regard to Sally's progress with these materials. Consequently the set work was adjusted and new materials were added according to Sally's needs.

Towards the end of the year the Support Officer Learning Difficulties, the teacher and the Home Tutor evaluated Sally's program and the teaching materials used, and reviewed the on-going assessment data collected to date. An assessment of Sally's future needs was made, supported by information gained from testing procedures such as the Domain phonics test, and Early Years Easy Screening. Following this assessment Sally's teacher and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties liaised with Sally's future Year Two teacher to discuss what had been implemented during the course of 1998. The Hand-Over Notes prepared by Sally's Year One teacher document Sally's difficulties with speech and auditory skills and note the success of the modified set activities in conjunction with the collaborative efforts of the Home Tutor, teacher, Support Officer Learning Difficulties and external agencies.

Issue:

The Home Tutor needed to be upskilled in the use of teaching strategies face-to-face.

Issue:

Staff changes complicate the ongoing support from year to year that students need to maintain their gains.

Year Two

In the first term of Year Two, the Psychologist at the District Office assessed Sally and found that she had areas of profound strength and weakness. In particular the Psychologist noted that Sally's skills in solving non-verbal problems and working quickly and efficiently with visual information fell within the average range. Processing complex information and manipulating parts to solve novel problems without using words was a strength for Sally. Although her skills in understanding verbal information, thinking with words, and expressing thoughts in words were found to be a lot less developed. This pattern is often found amongst students experiencing difficulty with learning because the majority of educational instruction involves some form of verbal learning.

Sally achieved her best performance among the non-verbal reasoning tasks on the Picture Completion subtest. This was an indication of her ability in visual discrimination and may have been influenced by her general level of alertness to the world around her and her long-term visual memory. Sally's area of weakness was in the block design subtest, which assessed her ability to analyse part whole relationships when

Issue:

The majority of SOTA set work is printed text, which is then read to the student. The Home Tutor completing work set for the student complicates the monitoring process.

information is presented spatially. Visual spatial perception and fine motor co-ordination may influence performance on this subtest, as well as planning ability.

The Psychologist recommended that Sally continue to access speech therapy and further language instruction and also felt that she would benefit from direct instruction teaching styles to eliminate the need for her to process complex language information. This report was distributed to Sally's parents, her teacher and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties and became the basis of further planning and teaching.

The IEP produced for Sally in Year Two reflects the Psychologist's recommendations. This included a range of easier reading materials selected specifically to match Sally's reading level, phonics and comprehension activities, a vocabulary expansion program that covered the maths and language curriculum areas, fine motor co-ordination activities, Maths number, shape and pattern activities.

The Home Tutor was given assistance to prioritise Sally's work according to her learning needs. She agreed to a timetable that focused on 10 minutes of Speech per day, followed by the Reading lessons, and Language and Maths specifically planned for Sally's IEP, and finally any set work given by the School of the Air.

Regular communication between the Home Tutor and Sally's teacher and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties ensured that the content of Sally's IEP was continually adjusted according to her progress and current learning needs. Sally's teacher's Ongoing Contact notes record some of her progress:

6/99 Contacted Mrs C. Reports Sally is progressing well and is developing confidence with Reading and Writing. Starting to see smaller words within words. Happy to read sentence from book onto tape.

28/5 Contacted Mrs C. Reads short sentences consisting of four words each from Distar Reading Program. Sight words increasing, breaking words up to read them, e.g. r at = rat s it = sit. Attempting to read books from Language sets, frustration about reading on air diminishing.

7/99 Contacted Mrs C. She is now giving 3 letter word Spelling test daily, eight a day. Sally is now ready for this. Big improvement with speech. Sally now more outgoing and speaking more.

28/7 Contacted Mrs C. Sally said this long and grammatically correct sentence during Speech lesson on air - "This yummy sandwich has got jam inside and I like it!" Fantastic effort.

4/8 Mrs C. rang, Sally now able to substitute word beginnings, e.g. sock, lock. Took a pile of books and 'appeared' to be reading them, as opposed to just flicking through pictures.

Issue:

Adjustment to the student's program is dependent upon the judgements of the Home Tutor who has no formal training in this area and who, being a parent, is likely to hold a subjective point of view.

Throughout the year Sally's teacher, the Support Officer Learning Difficulties and the Psychologist would meet to discuss Sally's progress and any issues that might arise from her learning program. One such issue was to do with the expectations that Sally's mother, Mrs Connolly, held in regard to Sally's progress. It became apparent that Mrs Connolly believed that once Sally's language had improved she would be able to perform at the same academic and intellectual level of other children her age. It seemed that Mrs Connolly had not fully understood the extent of her daughter's learning difficulties and needed to have a more realistic timeframe for her daughter's academic progress. This had become perceptible in the way that Mrs Connolly as Sally's Home Tutor hadn't understood the need to place fewer verbal demands on Sally when working with her, nor did she seem to understand how to break down instructions into the small steps that Sally could cope with.

It was felt that as a Home Tutor, Mrs Connolly would need support to be able to work at the verbal levels Sally required and the Psychologist set about accessing a range of tools that would help her to do this. Included were questioning techniques, a chart of language skills acquisition and a Direct Instruction Phonics Program. In the context of a discussion about the use of the Direct Instruction program the Psychologist was able to raise issues to do with the level of verbal support required to further Sally's learning and the implications that a language delay would have on her education in the long-term. Initially this was difficult for Mrs Connolly to accept but she has been able to reach a more realistic understanding of Sally's educational outlook thanks to a good deal of practical and emotional support and the consistently positive attitude of her teachers, the Support Officer Learning Difficulties, the Speech Therapist and the Psychologist.

Hand-over notes written by Sally's Year Two teacher at the end of the year record the progress made with modified set work in Language and in Speech. She recommended that a Behaviour Management Program and the Distar Arithmetic 1 be used in Year Three, along with continued use of the IEP and the modified set work. Continued assessment in Maths and Language was also recommended.

Year Three

Sally's IEP in Year Three follows a prescribed timetable formulated collaboratively with her Home Tutor and her School of the Air teacher, Jane. This program sets tasks appropriate to Sally's developmental and learning stage in the areas of Reading, Writing and Spelling and Jane also conducts speech sessions with Sally utilising a hands-free phone. This style of program works to allow Sally to function at her ability level and provides her with the success she needs to boost her self esteem which in turn gives her the motivation to learn more. This situation took some negotiating on Jane's behalf as the Home Tutor had thought that Sally had made enough progress in Year Two to be able to cope with the Year Three set work.

It was really hard because Mum feels that her student is coming along well. And she is in the small steps that she's making, but she's not perhaps where you'd like her to be at that particular age or developmental stage. So it was her dealing with it. And then talking to Mum because she sees

Issue:

An amount of contact time needs to be provided so that the teacher and SOLD can meet with specialists such as the psychologist and speech therapist to ensure the appropriateness of the modified delivery of individual programs.

Issue:

Parents, Home Tutors and students have limited experience in estimating benchmark standards of work.

this student in a situation at the SOTA. She doesn't see this student in Year Three classes in the wider Western Australian perspective.

Jane sent the Home Tutor the set work required for the first term and asked her to highlight the parts that would be too hard for Sally. The Home Tutor did this and returned with two thirds of the work marked as too difficult.

I said to her (Home Tutor), well we're already putting this Spelling program in place. We're already reading separate books as well as the books in the set, but she's reading books that she can cope with. And we're making her do all this extra work as well. So why not, for the third of the work that she is actually going to be able to do, just get rid of the whole lot and base the activities around the reading books that she can read and give her activities that she can do. And when she feels like she's succeeding you might find as well - she tends to throw a lot of tantrums and she's got very low self-esteem - it may pay off. So Mum was a bit teary but she understood and she realised that her daughter has got problems. I said to her as well, it might be that one day she makes it back onto the set work. It might be that one day she doesn't, but you've got to look at what's best for Sally. Mum's first reaction was, "That's a lot of work for you." And I said, "I don't care I want Sally to read and write and at least get through the basics. So we've just put this program into place and Mum's been implementing it for the last couple of days. In fact she just phoned this morning, "It's so exciting! Sally actually managed to read this all by herself!" And she hasn't been able to work independently and she's been having problems and she's (Home Tutor) been having problems with her throwing tantrums. It's the first time in ages that she's succeeding, she feels like she's getting somewhere, she's happy, she's saying to you, "I can do this. I can do that. There's none of this "Sit down. Pull out your pencil." I know it's still early days but Mum's feeling positive, the student's feeling confident and she can succeed and she's getting things. And I'm finding that she's (Sally) excited on the radio.

Issue:
Parents can misunderstand the extent of their child's learning difficulties and can possess unrealistic expectations of their child's ability to make progress quickly.

The Student

Sally is able to recognise areas of her schoolwork that she has made progress in and is able to articulate some of these improvements. She has begun to use the computer at home to do some of her writing and has produced pieces of writing that provide evidence of the progress she has made.

The following samples have been typed by the teacher from her written work.

Jane
School of the Air

24 February 2000

Der Jane,

We had a train derail here a Rowlands. There was 5 wagons and they are green and yellow and they hav rox in them.

Yesturday a big crain came wot and put the wagons back on the railwa lin. The wagons broc the railwa lin and smash the sleepers. The lin is closd.

From
Sally

Amy and Hepzibah

Amy bought two tickets at the railway station, one for herself and one for Hepzibah. They sat side by side on the journey home when suddenly.....

the train had a crash. Everyone got off the train becos there was a fir. the fir engine got to the station and startd to hos the fir.

Amy and Hepzibah were still on the train. Hepzibah smashd the windo and pickd Amy up and got owt the windo.

They got on a bus and got hom.

INT: Tell me about the things that you are really good at?
I just saw you doing something that you're really good at.

Sally: Computer.

INT: Why do you think you are so good at the computer?

Sally: 'Cos I like computers and I have one at my home.

INT: What things are you good at at school?
Sally: I always play games with my mummy.
INT: What do you do with your teacher on a Wednesday?
(Reference to the games that Sally plays during speech lessons.)
Sally: Play games and I get some stickers.
INT: Can you tell me what reading is?
Sally: I read stories to my Ma, stories to my teacher.
INT: And I hear you're very good at it. Is that right?
Sally: Yes!

Sally is at the beginning stages of independence and has newly acquired the reading strategy of "sounding out", which is used to isolate and break down the sounds in words.

INT: What's happened already with your reading this year?
Sally: I'm already reading books and I can read all of them.
INT: What kind of help do you need with your reading?
Sally: Can help me sound the word out.
INT: And does that help you have a look at the words and know what they are?
Sally: Yes!

INT: What do you do when you come across a word you don't know?
Sally: I sound it out.
INT: Anything else?
Sally: I do the ... I have a look at them and think what it is and rewrite it.

INT: What do you do when you don't understand what you read?
Sally: I do some spelling.
INT: Do you think that helps you understand what you read?
Sally: Uh-humm.
INT: Do you ever ask Mum?
Sally: Yes.
INT: What sort of questions do you ask Mum?
Sally: I say, "Mum, why don't you help me? I'm a little bit stuck on a book and I can't read."

Sally is also very clear which areas of her school work she finds difficult. In Maths she is still working on Year Three set work. However, this curriculum area will shortly be negotiated into Sally's IEP.

INT: What sort of things do you find hard?
Sally: I hate bones. (A reference to recent work completed

Issue:
Home Tutors can over-emphasise the 'sounding out' strategy. Students need to be taught a range of strategies to decode.

Issue:
Home Tutors' lack of experience in working with students with learning difficulties can

on joints of the body in Health.)
 INT: What about your schoolwork? Do you find writing hard?
 Sally: Yes and Maths.
 INT: Why do you find writing hard?
 Sally: 'Cos I don't like it.
 INT: Why don't you like it?
 Sally: 'Cos I hate joining them up.
 INT: You mean joining the letters up?
 Sally: Yes, 'cos that's why I hate it.
 INT: When you're thinking of something to write can you often think of good things?
 Sally: No!
 INT: Why do you hate Maths?
 Sally: 'Cos you have to do all these Maths and write them like stories. (Reference to the Home Tutor asking Sally to write her numerals as words and to her use of a Maths Journal.)

see them focussing on aspects of learning that may hinder students' progress rather than facilitate it.

Although Sally is able to talk about the range of people that she feels can help her with her work, her conversation reflects the great reliance she still has on her mother to assist her in resolving learning difficulties.

INT: Who do you think can help you?
 Sally: My mum or my dad or my little sister.
 INT: What does your teacher do to help you?
 Sally: Do all the air lessons and help us to do Language, Spelling and Writing and Reading.
 INT: And you do some fantastic Art, too.
 Sally: Yes!
 INT: When you have a problem what do you do about it?
 Sally: I tell my mum. Say, "Mummy, I don't know how to read these things before."
 INT: And does Mummy help you?
 Sally: Yes!
 INT: What types of things do you ask your Home Tutor to help you with?
 Sally: Maths, Handwriting and Stories.
 INT: Can you tell me how they help you?
 Sally: She helps me doing... help me do some extra work. She reads a little bit for me.
 INT: Do you always ask for help when something is too hard?
 Sally: Yes!
 INT: Can you work some things out by yourself?
 Sally: Yes, sometimes. Handwriting and that's all.
 INT: What sorts of questions do you ask yourself?

Sally: I look in my pages (Handwriting book), do triangles and rectangles and stars and circles and squares and rectangles.

INT: Do you check your own work for mistakes?

Sally: Mum does.

Sally's estimation of her own progress is positive. She indicates that she feels she is beginning to achieve some things more independently than she had previously been able to and she is very proud of the fact that she can do things "all by myself."

INT: I think the way you write your stories has changed, where do you write your stories now?

Sally: On the computer.

INT: Do you do all your work from the sets?

Sally: Yes.

INT: How do you feel about the way you do your work now that you've been helped?

Sally: I do it all by myself.

INT: How do you know when you have improved your Reading, Writing and Spelling?

Sally: I sound my words out.

INT: And does it get a little bit easier?

Sally: Yes.

INT: Does you teacher give you lots of stickers and things?

Sally: I got 2.

The Home Tutor

Mrs Connolly has noticed a change in Sally's attitude to her schoolwork and in particular to the way in which she is more prepared to attempt to read books and to have a go at Spelling. Where she would previously have had a tantrum, she now attempts nearly everything.

She was always frightened to read because she couldn't see the word to talk about it. She could look at the pictures, tell a whole story, but she couldn't read you anything. So now we've got to the stage where she's having a go at sounding out her words and reading words.

Mrs Connolly began to have concerns for Sally's learning before she started school. She noticed that Sally's speech was "very run together" and as she spent most of her time around adults, it appeared "adult oriented". Children would be unable to understand what she was trying to say and Sally appeared to be speaking "on a totally different level". Mrs Connolly describes Sally's sentences as being all run together and lacking in structure.

These concerns began to be addressed in Sally's Pre-primary year when she was taken to the Speech Therapist. The resulting program that has been implemented by the school and Mrs Connolly has allowed her to

Issue:
This program required one-to-one interaction

progress well. The focus of this program has been on games that require hands-on skills which maintain Sally's interest levels and ensure that she isn't working with materials that use reading skills beyond her capacity. Consequently Sally has really enjoyed this program and has remained a motivated participant. Periodic assessments by the Speech Therapist result in her program being adjusted as Sally is progressing.

Now she can make a sentence...put all her thoughts into a sentence or context, so she can explain what's going on. It's really wonderful.

Mrs Connolly sees the ways in which Sally's teacher, Jane, offers support to Sally as making a great contribution to the progress that Sally is making. This mostly takes the form of once-a-week phone lessons where Jane interacts with Sally and less frequently during home visits.

Doing the lessons once a week and helping Sally along the way when she and the SOLD come for home visits too. They play games with her and work through it all at home. But mainly the once a week contact on the phone, discussing, playing games and working through it, but making it a fun activity. Not a clinical type set up. So it's been working.

Jane has been able to support Mrs Connolly and also assists her in organising Sally's Speech activities that follow-up each lesson and in the modification of set work. Similarly Mrs Connolly has felt supported in the implementation of Sally's Reading and Language programs.

The support that I'm getting is speech lessons, materials, the help with changing set work around and putting in extra materials to substitute for things that are too hard. Basically if I ring up and say that something's a problem we sort the problem out and change it. And we use the email. I love that. Instantaneous answers. Email it in and there's a reply straight away. That gave Sally such a buzz because she'd done all that hard work. Not having to wait for two weeks when the end of the set work is sent in. When we send it now we get an answer within the day.

After the Speech lesson every week I usually have a discussion with Jane. She'll let me know how Sally has gone and what we need to work on for the rest of the week. And I usually let Jane know how the rest of that week has gone, whether things are successful or whether we need to repeat them again. Usually just a discussion over the phone.

It is the Support Officer Learning Difficulties's role to support Mrs Connolly and Jane in their work with Sally and Mrs Connolly has come to appreciate this support, particularly her ability to access learning materials appropriate to Sally's needs.

Having the SOLD here has meant we've been able to get more materials. Before it was like, well, we'll have to see what we can find. Now it's like, "Yes, I know of this. Or there's this that I can get my hands on." I guess the SOLD makes it look easy 'cos she knows exactly what's out there and she can grab it and get it out for us to start working on. Whereas

Issue:
Home Tutors working with students with learning difficulties require frequent and rapid feedback.

before it was, "Hang on, I'll have to look around. I don't know what's available, I'll have to ask somebody." It's been good. If it's there, she'll grab it.

Mrs Connolly has been Sally's Home Tutor for five years and found the first couple of years the hardest but things began to improve as Sally made progress. One of the most difficult things for Mrs Connolly is being a mother and a teacher.

You can't separate them, it's too hard. You can't go in and say, "Okay, well I'm a teacher now." That doesn't work because I've still got little Robyn running around, "Mum, Mum, Mum, Mum." They look to you still as Mum. You don't separate the discipline either. You discipline them there (in the schoolroom) just the same as if you were outside playing. If you need to discipline - you have to discipline. It doesn't change. I tried it. "This is the schoolroom, I'm now your teacher." Didn't work. I'm just mum.

When Mrs Connolly is confronted with Sally's learning difficulties as they are working together she uses a range of strategies to help them both to cope. These are skills she has acquired along the way in her role as a Home Tutor.

If Sally is having difficulty completing her work I try not to miss things out. I try to get them completed. Sometimes it might mean putting the activity aside and doing something different like breaking the Language up and giving a bit of Art and coming back to it later. Or having a smoko type break, having a rest, forgetting it for a few minutes and coming back to it again and trying again. But usually the break's the best thing.

And if Sally has a really bad tantrum I'll walk away and give her Time Out. Or if she's really, really cranky I'll pack up and she'll go for a sleep. Go away for an hour or half an hour, have a sleep, come back later. Fine. It works. You can tell by the child's attitude it's time for Time Out. I suppose it's instinct says to you that the child's just not coping. For example Sally starts to get fidgety and the tone of her voice changes to a "Grrrr". When she's saying not just "yes", it's "YES!" She gets abrupt and you know then things are starting to get a bit hard. So it's probably time to break or change, have Time Out before it gets too bad.

Mrs Connolly has felt comfortable working with the School of the Air staff to resolve her daughter's educational concerns. She feels that from the outset the school staff has worked enthusiastically to try to resolve Sally's learning difficulties as early in her school life as possible. She has felt that she has been treated as an integral part of the school and has had many positive experiences that have affirmed the sense of community she feels here.

It's a family. You can generally chat but you can discuss your work. Like on Seminar night. You can just chat to all the other mums and Home Tutors and have a general big discussion. You can pick up so many things, just little tips

Issue:
Home Tutors need to be able to employ a range of behavior management strategies to cope with student's poor behavior.

Issue:
Positive feedback is vital to the Home Tutor and the student.

along the way. And it's so relaxed, it's not like a teacher-parent type thing. We're all teaching, so we're all together.

Positive experiences this year have been reading and starting to spell. Towards the end of last year she started sounding out her words and we were getting all the consonants and most of the vowels, which is a big plus because before she wasn't getting all of the consonants. This year her sight words have improved, so she can actually read better. Even over a couple of weeks her sight words have improved. It's just leaps and bounds. The reading's going along and therefore the spelling's happening, spelling's starting to come into the reading and the writing. It's all just inter-linking and happening.

It's nice to hear outside people hear or notice the difference in what's happening. And sometimes you think to yourself is something really happening? And Sally spoke to her Nan and her Nan said, "WOW!" It was just incredible 'cos before she used to just - "Yes. No. Yes. No." over the phone. And now she's holding a conversation and discussing what's happening. It's unbelievable; I'm rapt. It's made a big difference, that's all.

I don't think I'd put her in a mainstream school at the moment 'cos I just don't think she'd get anywhere. Whereas having the support and the one-on-one just means that if she falls behind or something happens we can get the support for her.

Mrs Connolly's educational expectations of Sally have been revised since she has been involved with her learning and she had this to say about what she hopes Sally will achieve before she reaches secondary school.

I want Sally to be able to read and write. To be able to correspond, hold a conversation, communicate with people. To be able to be independent - definitely an independent person by high school. My expectations for this year were to have her reading by the end of the year. I'm half way there. [Laughing] Don't set your goals too high.

The Teacher

Jane has been a teacher for five years and has worked in a range of teaching situations over this period of time. Her teaching experiences began in an Aboriginal community, working with students who, in mainstream schooling, would mostly be classified as having learning difficulties. She has also worked in the large country towns in Western Australia, where some of her students needed to work on individual education plans. In her present situation at School of the Air she continues to match educational experiences to individual learning needs in spite of the constraints that this type of schooling provides.

Jane's pre-service training included study in the area of Learning Difficulties and the professional development that she has been involved in over the last few years has added to her understandings of literacy

acquisition. This has included professional development in First Steps, the Early Literacy Project and Literacy Net as delivered by the Education Department of Western Australia.

In this particular School of the Air there appears to be a wide range of children considered to have learning difficulties, with fewer requiring extension than remediation. Jane defines students with learning difficulties as:

Any student that's having some sort of a problem with learning. It could be either end of the scale, it could be talented and gifted or they could be students who, for one reason or another, are having problems with succeeding in Literacy, Maths or anything at the lower end of the scale. Any non-success in curriculum areas.

The model of organisation that the School of the Air has put in place to assist students with learning difficulties comprises the Principal, the Support Officer Learning Difficulties, the teacher, the Home Tutor, the parents, and the student. Each stakeholder contributes collaboratively to the case that is co-ordinated by the Support Officer Learning Difficulties. It is the Support Officer Learning Difficulties who provides teachers and Home Tutors with information, advice, support, and ideas.

Anything that we feel that we may need in order to help a student with learning difficulties. She'll go through and assess and diagnose if we don't know how to or don't know what to do. She's there to help us when we're collaborating with the parents and Home Tutors and she supports the parents and Home Tutors out there too. If I have concerns about a student, which can be parent or teacher initiated, I'll discuss them with the Principal and the SOLD and together we'll consider what can be implemented in a program. The Principal then steps back whilst we (SOLD and teacher) go ahead and collaborate with the parent and the student. Older students are more able to take on some responsibility for their program than are younger children. We put together the things that will work and will fit into their daily routine, and then we put our plan together from that.

In those cases when the family employs the Home Tutor the stakeholders involved in the planning would be the parents and the Home Tutor collaboratively. In most cases the parents are the Home Tutor and they have input into the plan because it has to fit in with their other duties. Also, because they're delivering the program it has to be what they're capable of, depending on their educational background. The Home Tutor is supported by the teacher and the teacher needs to make sure they develop a good rapport with their Home Tutor otherwise it's very hard to deliver a successful curriculum. Home Tutors need to know they can speak to you whenever they want about more than just the child's work, for moral support and to suggest how to change things.

There is very regular liaison between each of the stakeholders. In Sally's case her Home Tutor phones me

Issue:
A strong, supportive relationship needs to exist between stakeholders to enable each of them to be open about their concerns and therefore able to participate effectively in the collaborative process.

daily, and if she hasn't phoned me I phone her to see how things are going. She'll regularly speak to the SOLD and she'll chat to the Principal. I speak to Sally regularly either by email or on the phone. So I'm in regular contact, more so than in mainstream school.

The assessment/ planning/ evaluation/ feedback cycle works constantly to evaluate the ongoing information and data collected by the teachers from air lessons, set work, and home visits. Verbal feedback is given to Sally's Home Tutor almost daily by phone and email while weekly IEP reports and fortnightly set reports assist Jane and Mrs Connolly to decide how Sally's program should be modified throughout the school term. Formal school reports are written for parents at the end of each semester. Maintaining an ongoing cycle of assessment/ planning/ evaluation/ feedback is very time consuming and Jane, not unlike most teachers, finds sustaining this level of interaction in the School of the Air situation to be a lot of work. However, she is quick to point out that she would be doing just this level of planning, monitoring and evaluation in mainstream schools and that it is worthwhile when student begin to progress.

Prior to the School of the Air adopting the model which employs a Support Officer Learning Difficulties to assist in the process of helping students with learning difficulties the assessment/ planning/ evaluation/ feedback cycle did not appear to work as well. Jane has noticed that the work that the Support Officer Learning Difficulties does in coordinating IEPs and accessing materials for children at risk has given greater focus to the teacher's ability to program to individual need. There has been a greater level of communication between staff members about students with learning difficulties as a result of the Support Officer Learning Difficulties ensuring a level of continuity in program delivery for these students. It is now possible for the School of the Air to ensure that students on IEPs receive continuity in the provision of their programs from year to year by having the Support Officer Learning Difficulties liaise with the appropriate teaching staff.

Jane perceives that there have been definite benefits for the students with learning difficulties that she teaches. These have not only been apparent in the results achieved in testing but also in the positive change in student attitude to schoolwork which has been observed during interactions on air and while making home visits. Jane has also noticed that the Home Tutors have a more positive attitude towards student progress. When they see their student succeed they in turn have more confidence in their ability as a tutor. Parents, other than those with students experiencing learning difficulties, interact daily with the students during air lessons and are made aware of the problems that some of the students are working through and of the progress that they make. Consequently, Jane has also received positive feedback about these students from other parents and has noticed that the parents are very supportive of one another.

Jane would like to see students complete literacy and numeracy testing upon enrolment at the school so that modified programs can be provided for those students who require it from the outset. She points out that a lot of time can be lost in the School of the Air situation before a teacher can gather the evidence required to support the decision to place a student on an independent education program. A consequence of the geographical

isolation of students enrolled at a School of the Air is that a large part of teacher-student interaction occurs through the Home Tutor. Therefore teachers are reliant on observations about students that are made by the Home Tutor, who is often the parent, and which may lack the objectivity that a teacher can provide. Jane reiterated the need to give consideration to the time involved in the setting up of IEPs and the level of documentation required to monitor the progress of students.

Neville Phillips

aged 11 years

Introduction

Neville Phillips is a student in Year 6 at a School of the Air who has recently come to Western Australia from the eastern states with his family. The family live and work on a station about two hours from the closest town. Mr and Mrs Phillips are involved with the provision of training in an Aboriginal community. This is a demanding position for them as they are constantly responding to new crises on a daily basis. Neville's Home Tutor is his mother, Mrs Phillips, who has had a limited amount of experience in this role.

In the eastern states Neville attended a mainstream school and because of his learning difficulties his mother sought a place for him at a School of Distance Education. Neville has speech difficulties and is hearing impaired. He displays some processing difficulties and indicates a need for a behaviour management program. His Home Tutor has found it difficult to set up a daily working routine for Neville and has had some problems taking on this role with him. Neville's teacher at the School of the Air is Pat.

Neville has a designated classroom with space for a computer, a radio, a workbench, and storage of learning materials. Neville mostly relies on his mother to locate resources and so she has organised the learning materials in the classroom so that Neville can begin to access them independently.

As his mother is frequently called away from her role as Home Tutor to help in the community, Neville is often left to work by himself and because of his learning difficulties he finds this problematic. If he is left on his own for long periods of time he often gives up trying to do his schoolwork and goes and rides his motorbike.

As most of the set work materials provided by the School of Isolated and Distance Education are print based, Neville's lack of reading skills impact greatly on his ability to complete work independently. A modified language program consisting of structured and repetitive activities was developed by the School of the Air staff to help reduce the stress placed on Neville when he was trying to complete activities without Home Tutor supervision. Daily faxed correspondence between the Home Tutor and Neville's teacher, Pat, assists the Home Tutor to be aware of what Neville has accomplished and what he needed further assistance with. A Braille machine was accessed by the Support Officer Learning Difficulties to help address Neville's processing difficulties in spelling and sight vocabulary recognition. Neville is also able to carry out spelling and vocabulary development activities in Braille without supervision.

Neville has three brothers who have all had difficulty learning to read. His parents have advised the School of the Air staff that his older brothers did not begin to read until they were in their fifth or sixth year of school and that they were expecting Neville to do likewise. There is no

pressure from Neville's parents for him to read as it their expectation that it will happen when he is ready.

Neville has joined the School of the Air this year and his Home Tutor is his mother, Mrs Phillips. Neville's previous school records provide an important overview of his recent educational history.

Year Five

These records indicate that Neville has been participating in a home schooling program with a School of Distance Education since the beginning of Year Five. During this time he was diagnosed with a level four hearing impairment which was subsequently downgraded to level three and meant that Neville would have difficulty hearing in large groups. He appeared to experience many problems with his schooling and it became increasingly obvious to his teachers that his learning difficulties extended beyond his hearing problems.

Neville underwent further processes of diagnosis involving an occupational therapist, a speech therapist, and a psychologist. A WISC analysis was completed and a variety of anecdotal evidence was gathered from a range of school sources. At the time of testing Neville was nine years and four months old. The information gathered from these different sources is outlined below:

- A Neale Analysis of Neville's reading at this time indicates that he did not attain a score.
- The Waddington Diagnostic Reading Test gave a reading age of seven years and a spelling age of six years.
- The Guidance Report indicated that a degree of support was needed to further develop Neville's expressive, receptive and written communication.
- The Speech pathology report indicated that Neville had poor visual memory, which was identified as the common cause for the poor performance in reading and spelling tests.

The results of these tests led the professionals involved to conclude that Neville had a Visual Memory disorder which was inhibiting him from accessing and using written language. It was also noted that Neville's intellectual and problem solving abilities were average to above average for his peer group and that he was numerically proficient. Neville's academic achievement had been poor, due to his inability to access the curriculum.

In term four of Year Five, Neville was provided with a modified program to accommodate language building and this was implemented by his Home Tutor and school language support staff. This program incorporated visual and phonetic word building for ten to twenty minutes a day at home and was combined with school visits twice a week which focused on strategies for reading and writing.

There were some areas of concern that would impact on the development of future educational goals for Neville and these were most obvious in

Issue:

The SOTA had access to student records before the student arrived in WA and was able to liaise with his previous school and teacher.

the areas of reading and writing. Neville's ability to decode and construct meaning from text was well below his chronological age and it became obvious that he would need to develop these skills if he was to cope with a home schooling program. The staff at the School of Distance Education believed that Neville's educational needs could only be met through a program incorporating visual, auditory and kinaesthetic activities which would enable him to have many different triggers at his disposal to decode and produce written text. The psychologist attached to the school had experienced success with the use of Braille as an interim process when developing the visual memory of words and the staff sought his guidance in devising a program that would assist Neville to develop his grasp of sight words. Neville's learning difficulties were classified as being at a level five, where level six is the most severe.

These records note Mrs Phillip's concern for her son's development in reading and writing and that she was keen to access any services that would help her to assist Neville.

A sample of Neville's work at this time

03/11/99

Der 'Pat',
 in 'Neville Phillips' and im 10 years
 old.
 lik talking^{to} people.
 lik biding thing.

 want to go to moorey wld.
 lik tigr fom wene the poow.
 ok forced to meting you.
 from 'Neville'.

Year Six

Neville's family moved to Western Australia at the beginning of Year Six and he was enrolled in the School of the Air. His teacher Pat contacted the staff at the School of Distance Education that he had been attending to ascertain what was currently occurring in Neville's learning, what had already been attempted in his program and what he had enjoyed.

Although Neville had been taught at home, problems relating to behaviour management had limited the amount of teaching that was being

Issue:

Often parents are unable to cope with behaviour management issues relating to students who are having

done and in effect Neville had not practised reading consistently for some years. Consequently, his reading had deteriorated. difficulties.

Pat was able to establish that Neville was reading at about the level of a student in Year Three or Four and that a focus was still being made on the development of basic sight words and phonics. The reading strategies that he used to make meaning included reading on, re-reading, the beginnings of sounding out, and the use of picture cues. Neville had not developed skimming and scanning techniques and had not been asked to attempt to find the main idea in the texts that he read. Neville became frustrated when he was required to write and had been working through *the Support A Writer Program*. His spelling had begun to improve using the look/ feel/ write strategy.

Neville's teachers had previously attempted to use phonetic skills and had found that they did not appear to work for him. They had also been using a tactile stimulus through a Braille machine, focusing on the Whole Word Approach. Some speech work had been done and it was recommended that this be investigated further. They also recommended that Neville learn harder words in isolation and that a computer program be accessed that would read back what the student had written.

It appeared that Neville enjoyed books about skeletons and lizards, Mathematics, Social Science and Science, building and manipulating and the use of the computer.

The first Home Visit

Early in the first term Pat and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties made a home visit to meet with Neville and his Home Tutor to establish some long-term goals for his learning. After some discussion it was decided that it was important for Neville to aim to read independently and to take ownership of his learning. An initial plan of supplementary learning activities was drawn up to be actioned by Pat, the Home Tutor and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties. This included:

- accessing a Braille machine and the Fry sight vocabulary words to use with it,
- taking a selection of spelling words from Neville's writing which were to be converted into Braille,
- a focus on neatness in work, and
- beginning a search of external agencies to find out more information about Symbolic Dysfunctionality.

The second Home Visit

A second visit was made to the station by Pat and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties early in Term 2 and Pat has noted that due to unavoidable circumstances the Home Tutor has not been able to provide the close supervision required to support Neville in participating fully in the Air Sessions and his school program in Term 1.

Issue:
The role of Home Tutor is not necessarily a priority for parents.

When his Home Tutor was unable to work with him it appeared that Neville had capitalised on his 'non-reader' status by not completing any work that required him to read independently. Although he required a lot of assistance to complete reading-based tasks, Neville had not used his initiative to find alternative school-tasks to do when his Home Tutor was called away.

Pat was concerned about the amount of work that Neville had not done and discussed this with his Home Tutor. Mrs Phillips agreed it was important that she devote more time to assisting Neville and realised that she needed to make it clear to the community and her employers that she was no longer able to be 'on call' indefinitely. Pat also realised that realistically the Home Tutor was not always going to be there to assist Neville and so suggested strategies that might be employed to enable him to take more responsibility for his own learning. These strategies included:

- Setting up a timetable of achievable activities for Neville to complete each day.
- Accessing computer programs, audiotapes, etc to provide activities that Neville could work on independently.
- Ensuring Neville was aware of the activities that he was expected to be able to work on independently.
- Assisting Neville to utilise real life situations in his learning, e.g. if Mrs Phillips was called on suddenly to do some cooking Neville could assist and then tape record a recount of the events or record the process that he was involved in.
- Utilising Neville's computer competencies to create his timetable and a daily/ weekly reporting form to record activities completed and for which he was responsible for faxing or emailing to Pat at school.
- Neville taking responsibility to use the Braille machine to create his own sound/ word cards.
- Neville taking responsibility for continued participation in Air Sessions.
- Continuing with some of the activities from the set work so that he is familiar with the process and language of those activities.

Pat noticed a strong sense of family support for Neville and that the Phillips family did a lot of work in reading to and with him. He felt that the Phillips were positive and optimistic and that they had realistic expectations for their son. Neville's parents understand that he needs to overcome his reading difficulty to fully participate in many school activities. Neville's three brothers all experienced reading difficulties, which they overcame by Year Five or Six of their primary school years. Further to this there is a history of deafness in the family.

Mrs Phillips seemed very grateful for the level of support she received from the school and the reasons for Neville's lack of participation in the first term program appeared to be genuine. Pat also observed that Neville

Issue:
The success of programs is largely dependent upon the manner in which Home Tutors implement them.

Issue:
Parents need to assist students develop self-discipline.

had an easy-going nature and that, although not averse to school, he had become dependent upon his Home Tutor to impose a work structure. Hence the need for him to become more independent and responsible for his own learning.

A school visit

A family visit was conducted at the School of the Air as Mrs Phillips and Neville were in town taking Neville's grandparents to the airport. This provided Pat and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties with the opportunity of presenting a new program of work to Neville and his Home Tutor, as well as a chance to initiate a discussion about Neville's inappropriate behaviour in home and school situations.

The Support Officer Learning Difficulties worked with Neville to complete some Maths testing for school data collection while Pat met with the Home Tutor to outline Neville's new program and timetable and specific Home Tutor and student responsibilities. Neville was to complete a set amount of work daily and his Home Tutor was to fax a report of the day's activities to Pat each afternoon. The Home Tutor was keen to see Neville work within a structured program that would assist him to return to a regular work routine. It was also agreed that Neville would continue to participate in Air Sessions.

Pat initiated a discussion about Neville's behaviour which been observed at the Home Tutors' Seminar. The Home Tutor agreed that Neville's behaviour was at times very inappropriate and that she had observed similar behaviours at home. She felt that Neville had no sense of routine, nor did he take responsibility for his school work or school matters. For example, Neville was taking a long time to complete Maths activities that he was capable of because he engaged in a range of distracting behaviours, rather than actually doing the Maths. Both Pat and the Home Tutor agreed that this was a concern that needed to be confronted and dealt with.

The range of behaviours that were seen to be inappropriate included: answering back; arguing every point; poor eating and table manners; needing to be told several times to do something before he would comply; poor sense of personal space; rough behaviour when playing with younger children; and the use of emotionally manipulative behaviours with his mother.


Pat noticed that the Home Tutor was very open during this discussion and did not seek to justify or excuse the behaviours discussed. It was hoped that the new program would be effective in establishing a routine for Neville and that the Home Tutor would be able to confront and resolve some of the behavioural issues that prevent him from working effectively. With Pat's support the Home Tutor was to attempt to focus on one behaviour at a time. This meeting ended positively with Neville's teacher and Home Tutor agreeing to assess his progress on a regular basis.

Subsequent records show that Neville and his Home Tutor had begun to implement the new program and that Neville had begun to make some real progress with his reading and the completion of set work. The

Issue:
Raising behaviour management issues with parents can be difficult as they can be seen as being critical of their parenting skills.

reporting form is shown below.

Please complete and fax everyday to school

Day: Date:	Home Tutor comments
CHASE THE CARD Words per minute Miscues	
FAMILIAR READING What did Nathan choose? How many miscues?	
SHARED READING Title of book Text summary (two sentences – use words from book)	
Free word (add to spelling list)	
MAths Activities completed	
COMPUTER Activity chosen	
Time taken (can you beat 10minutes?)	
AIR LESSON/s (please circle) Home tutor present Y/N Were the set tasks completed Y/N	
TEACHER COMMENTS	
	

The Student

Neville feels that he is good at push biking, riding his motor bike, using his Braille machine, doing Maths and using the computer because these are activities that he enjoys. He has a good understanding of the

functions of reading and writing and what he might read or write for.

You read for everything really. You read for education or for fun, to learn. You read for enjoyment and to hear all about the world and everything like that. And writing ... well writing's to write your reports and if you've got an important story you want to write it's important that you won't forget it because you had a lot of important things to think about. And you just write down because it's fun some times and you just have to some times.

However, Neville has a less certain picture of himself as a reader and his reasons for reading.

Oh I don't know (why he reads), because I have to, because I can't read that well. I like magazines and comic books with pictures.

Neville is quite clear about the kinds of texts he has difficulty reading and how he goes about his reading.

Oh books with no pictures, books with little letters because otherwise I have to follow. And basically really long books because you get sick of it if you can't read it properly. I tried to read a comic book once and like the four pages took me about half an hour to read and I got sick of it. I try to read comic books a little bit every time and when I come to a word I don't know I go past it, and go back and see if it makes sense. And you know it makes sense when you read the next line and that helps me sometimes.

Neville's goal this year is to be able to read and write and in particular to read so that he can read a book whenever he wants. He perceives that he needs help to remember words and how to sound them out properly. He thinks that the School of the Air could assist him with his reading by providing him with picture books that contain a minimal amount of writing and pictures that support the text. At the same time he would like to be supported in his writing by not being asked to do 'hard writing' until he gets better at it.

Neville realises that he has a range of people who he can call upon to support him with his learning and he discusses this.

Everyone. My school teacher, Mum and Dad, even my brothers. My big brother Daniel, he got Stephen reading this book, he didn't want to read but he could. He couldn't read that well and Daniel got him on to this book and now he starts reading everything he wants and he really wanted this science fiction book called 'The Magic Wand' or something like that. And so what kept him reading was 'The Magic Wand'. And if I have problems my teacher shows me how to spell it... a little bit of it so I can get started. And on air if I can't spell it I mainly sound them out and I get them wrong anyway. And every one else has problems but I can work them out.

Neville believes that it will take him another year of work and practice

before he is able to read as well as he feels he needs to. In spite of this he recognises that he is presently already able to learn from his reading.

I learn a little bit. Like for Christmas I got the Guinness Book of Records 2000 book. They're books that everyone's going to try and read this year and you can read about things in it. Like the longest thing and it has a picture of it and they tell you how long they are. The most surprising one is that Steve's a slow pushbike rider and he's got all this gear on and he goes about 400 kms or something. And the tallest man in the world, I can't remember his name, he's nearly 3 metres. I think he might be a basketball player.

Neville finds reading, writing, and doing school work difficult and seeks assistance from his mother, father and teacher when he has a problem to deal with.

I'll go and ask Mum or like calling on air when I'm on air, or ring up Pat and he'll try to explain my work. I'll ask Mum to read something if I can't read it and Mum just tries to help me as much as she can. I ask Dad to help me with my maths 'cos when I was doing Home School last year I had him for Maths and I'd do Maths for half an hour and I was meant to be doing 10 or 20 minutes. I'd get something wrong and he'd keep writing it down and he'd keep making me do it on a piece of paper. It helped me a little bit maybe. It helped me with my times table for a while but as soon as I stopped doing it I had to get a piece of paper out and do it on that. And then when I stopped it for a month I forgot 'em. I can do 'em but I can't do 'em that well.

Neville appears to be reliant on other people for help when something is too hard for him and has difficulty working things out for himself. When there are no adults around to work with him his strategy for coping with problems is to "just skip pages if it isn't easy". His description of his efforts to proofread his writing give some sense of the level of responsibility that he demonstrates towards his own learning.

Issue:
Parent's
accountability
for their
children's
learning
outcomes.

Well, the way I do it is I can't do much about it. Like when I'm reading and I'm writing I sound out. And I'm left handed and later I can't read it anyway and I've forgotten what I was writing about by then anyway.

However, Neville does feel that he has made progress with his learning. Since accessing the Braille machine at his previous school last year he believes he is able to read and write, and spell words more easily. This initial use of the Braille machine was limited to twice weekly sessions but since coming to the School of the Air the Support Officer Learning Difficulties has been able to locate a machine for Neville's exclusive use at home. He finds the machine allows him to visualise and remember the words that he works with more readily and as a consequence he feels more confident about his ability to retain what he has learned.

The IEP that Pat has developed to help Neville work independently includes the use of a CD-ROM that allows him to continue working if his Home Tutor is absent. This also eases the pressure he feels to complete set tasks, as the reading and numeracy activities on the CD-

ROM appear to be continuous and he is able to work at his own pace. In this way Neville's sense of himself as a successful and independent student has begun to develop and he is finding the work he has to do a little easier. He is also able to measure his progress from the responses to his work that he receives from the people around him.

Well from everyone and my marks and everything, and myself when I try to read books. Well, Pat sees my schoolwork improving and Mum 'cos she doesn't have to help me as much.

The Teacher

Pat originally completed the two-year teacher-training program and then completed a Bachelor of Education. He has taught in city and country positions with most of his teaching experience within the field of special education.

I did a couple of years teaching in regular primary schools and then resigned to go overseas for a couple of years. When I came back I got a position working with children who were emotionally disturbed for a couple of years and then had ten years in special education. After that I had 7 years at TAFE working with adult students with disabilities and literacy needs and then four years here at the School of the Air.

Pat enjoys the different perspective and teaching experiences that the School of the Air provides and describes it as a very unusual job that doesn't suit everybody. He cites his breadth of teaching experience and maturity as assets to bring to the role of the School of the Air teacher in regard to relating to and socialising with parents and a wide range of people. He feels that aspects of the School of the Air teacher's role such as the demand on personal time, and the loose structure which requires teachers to be self-directed would be difficult for those teachers with expectations of a regular primary context.

But there is no training for it and you are thrown in at the deep end and it takes 2 or 3 years to become familiar with just how it all works and where materials come from. Quite often people come into a school and inherit a system that doesn't tell them anything about where the materials come from, how to order them, what's meant to go with each set that goes out to the student. There are often little bits and pieces hiding at the school and somehow you are meant to know them. Your parents can be very handy that way. When we came here we started documenting some of these things and one of the other teachers in particular took charge of building up a file of what actually happens because we walked in and had two years of head scratching before we figured out what do we do here.

It's the same with, you know, having to go out to families and set up radios and the like. There's absolutely no training for that and it's much easier to grasp aspects of the teaching role but from a technical nature, unless you happen to have

experience working with radios, then that is completely foreign. When I came along expecting, I suppose, all of the station people to have an understanding of those sorts of things because that's part of what they do out there, and they don't quite often, you know, you give them instructions, so there's a lot of on the job learning and on the spot thinking that you have to do, I think it's part of the role.

Each family situation and therefore each learning environment is quite different for each student in the class and Pat comments on the distinct characteristics of each School of the Air.

All the families are very different. You can sort of group some together in terms of their background and experiences and personality types but each living and social context is really quite different and I think that also varies from school to school. There's a culture that goes with each of the schools, which makes them quite different. Again there are some similarities, some threads that run through it all, but I think there is a slightly different sort of social and class difference that runs through some of the different areas from the Kimberley down through to the Nullarbor. The culture has been quite interesting to pick up and it's only through the experience of working within a SOTA that you start picking up the subtleties. And that's particularly useful if you happen to have a family that transfers from one station to another or comes from a School of the Air in Queensland or South Australia or Northern Territory. They come here with a different range of expectations and if you're not aware of the different contexts they might have come from or aren't secure in the knowledge of what your school provides, then it's really easy to be running around trying to provide all the things that simply don't exist within our system. So there are a lot of subtleties I think with the job that people need to get used to which takes a long time.

Pat describes a student with learning difficulties as one who is not able to cope with the level of work expected of their age group. He considers that most learning difficulties he encounters at the School of the Air are centred around literacy and that this is made more difficult for students as the set materials at the School of the Air are predominantly print based.

Another factor, which is a part of School of the Air teaching, is the dependence upon the oral interaction with students during air lessons. Such vital interaction occurs much less frequently than in mainstream schooling and becomes complicated when students lack the confidence to take part in air lessons. From time to time Pat has noticed that there are students who would benefit from being involved in a mainstream classroom and the interaction that they would have with other children. Although some students need a lot more interaction, most of the students perform well in the School of the Air context and are considered orally competent because of the range of social experiences they have in the situations they live in. Pat considers that this is a result of the very 'rich lives' that the students lead which include many opportunities for them to mix with adults for much of the time.

Issue:

Programs need to be designed around the family's ability to implement them.

Issue:

Students' over-confidence in social situations can be read as inappropriate and hence social behaviours need to be taught for a range of situations.

It has surprised me, the level of competence and confidence of the kids, often without the precociousness that you might find in other children. They have a comfort level with adults that is really quite rewarding at times, and at other times it's a little disarming.

Pat has clear views about the New Chidley model that the School of the Air has implemented to assist students with learning difficulties. He feels that the shift away from the old Chidley model where students from remote areas and their families were able to utilise a residential setting has disadvantaged those students that aren't attached to a School of the Air.

Chidley used to be open to somebody from Grass Patch or somebody from Salmon Gums and they could go down to Chidley to stay there and receive learning support. These days it's predominantly only for Schools of the Air and it's great for us. Although I don't know how long it will last as a position.

Pat is not totally convinced that the New Chidley model is the best way to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties and cites the inordinate expense of providing a Support Officer Learning Difficulties for the almost exclusive use of one SOTA. He also feels that the Support Officer Learning Difficulties should not be employed in a Public Service position and would prefer to see this as a teaching position so that a Support Officer Learning Difficulties can be involved in teaching and putting into practice the programs for the students. In spite of this he does feel that the program works well.

Pat perceives the Support Officer Learning Difficulties's role is to respond to the needs of students as identified by teachers or from information gained from whole school testing. Similarly, if a teacher didn't feel confident in dealing with a student's particular learning difficulty or felt that they needed support in their interactions with the Home Tutor and the student, they would contact the Support Officer Learning Difficulties and work together to produce an approach and a plan for responding to the student's needs. This usually involves further testing of the student by the Support Officer Learning Difficulties and the development of an IEP that might suit the student and Home Tutor's needs:

It really has to be something I think that suits both of them because it's the Home Tutor that has to implement it. So it has to be something that fits within the way they operate and it has to operate comfortably within their own schoolroom, something they feel they can implement. So far that has been generally successful.

Pat sees the Principal, the teacher and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties as almost one stakeholder because they are able to frequently discuss and update each other on the progress of any case in hand. He considers the most important task is for the school-based stakeholders to maintain effective communication with the Home Tutor. This, he perceives, is easy given that most of the Home Tutors are very grateful for any support and assistance they get. If there is a need to see a student on a regular basis the issues to do with distance and frequency of

personal contact might become a problem. Home visits do provide opportunities for teachers to observe students at work and to see how a Home Tutor works with them, or to have the Home Tutor observe a teacher work with the student. However, these opportunities are quite limited.

The success of plans and programs for students are always dependent upon the Home Tutor's implementation and this can sometimes become problematic. Initially Pat spent a lot of time modifying materials for Neville and was disappointed when the programs that he had developed were implemented haphazardly.

Pat prefers to maintain a relaxed and open relationship with all of the Home Tutors and to encourage frequent communication. He has made a point of not setting himself up as an expert and has endeavoured to provide the necessary physical and moral support that the Home Tutors need to fulfil their role.

So I think that the open relationship with the parents and encouraging dialogue and communication with them is absolutely crucial to the success of a program. They need to feel comfortable in saying to you, 'Oh look, I've got some concerns about this.' And quite often those concerns might be related simply to the amount of work that a student has to do. Some students who don't have a learning difficulty simply work at a much slower rate than other students who just chew the work out. And I also let people know that they don't have to be doing a certain amount of work, they don't have to do X number of sets of work per year, but as long as a student is doing you know a regular amount and working to the best of their ability then that is fine.

Pat likes to help the Home Tutor to take responsibility for the work that they complete with their student and encourages them to trust their judgement as the teachers of students. Even though many Home Tutors are reticent to do this Pat thinks that some of the parents are beginning to make some of these decisions and he encourages them to keep him informed of this.

One of the disadvantages for teachers at a School of the Air is that they are not able to view the processes students utilise when they are working.

We get the finished product coming into the school, we see the work, we mark their work, we chat to them on air but you don't actually see the processes involved and sometimes you get work and you go, 'Hmmm, I don't think it's all their work.' Or, 'I think they had a lot of help with this.' Or other times you go 'Wow! They're really moving on!' And you suddenly see the change they are going through but you don't actually sit and watch them going through those changes and that's again where it's really important to have that information coming in to you from Home Tutors as much as possible.

In Pat's class the Home Tutors of all of his students are the children's parents and when he has any concerns about student learning he addresses the Home Tutors (parents) directly. Depending upon the type

of concerns that he has, Pat will ask the Support Officer Learning Difficulties to join him on a home visit to observe the student working. In some instances a problem can be resolved by identifying the difficulties students have with their working processes and providing further explanation to clarify a process. At other times it may be necessary for the Support Officer Learning Difficulties and the teacher to complete more comprehensive testing to gain the information required to begin the process needed to set up an IEP that the Home Tutor and student can work by.

During this process the Home Tutor will often take responsibility for their student's learning difficulties and blame themselves for not being a good enough teacher or Home Tutor. Consequently it is important that the teacher and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties support the Home Tutor by creating a blame-free situation within which to work together. At this point the Home Tutor needs to feel able to achieve what has been planned for the student and to know that the School of the Air staff have confidence in their ability to do so. To a degree a shift in responsibility is made away from the Home Tutor and onto the student to take responsibility for their own learning and to develop independent learning strategies according to their ability and developmental level.

If the staff at the School of the Air are unable to utilise the resources they have to address a problem the availability of external agencies to help children with learning difficulties in an isolated situation are limited.

There isn't another external agency that's going to go out and visit them at home and deal with that. Sometimes the parents are simply faced with a decision, as happened last year, of sending a student away to boarding school and finding one where they felt the problem could be dealt with. That went hand in hand with seeking advice from a doctor regarding ADD and that sort of thing and trialing a program of medication. So they went looking for resources that we couldn't provide and they had to make a decision to do that and then seek another place that would suit the child.

On some occasions new families coming into the School of the Air or families who have had limited experience working within the context of distance education have difficulty getting younger students to understand how to do school in their home environment. In this situation students have difficulty relating to their parent as a teacher. It becomes clear that embedded in some of the student's difficulties is a need to be socialised and to be part of a classroom where they are able to see other students working and to understand what it means to be at school.

The School of the Air staff access the Resource Centre at the District Office and make use of the materials located there. They also access the psychologist, speech therapists and occupational therapists located at the District Office or the local hospital. On occasions the School of the Air staff have organised appointments with specialists for families when they come into town.

The Revise Service operates in this area and is a program where retired teachers visit isolated students and spend a period of up to four weeks with a particular family. This is seen to provide relief for parents, often at a time when they're involved in tasks such as mustering or shearing. In

the past the School of the Air staff have found the Revise teachers useful in assisting Home Tutors and students to set up a timetable and work routine or to simply just to give the Home Tutors a break so that they may step back and reflect on their work with their student.

Quite often it's a retired couple who come up and bring their caravan and their car and they get their fuel costs paid for and the family puts them up or feeds and waters them for the time that they're there. Some are very, very good and have been terrific and some have gone back to visit the same family 2 or 3 years in a row because they've just got on well together and the family has seen it as being invaluable.

Pat considers the Support Officer Learning Difficulties's role is one that requires them to respond to student need as identified through whole school testing or in response to a request from a Home Tutor or a teacher. In all instances the teacher is the first person with whom the parents and Home Tutors are encouraged to discuss any issues arising from their teaching. Subsequent to this the teacher would collaborate with the Support Officer Learning Difficulties.

In my case I would look at some work or learning materials that might assist in the first instance to give us a better idea of whether they're just struggling with a particular concept or struggling with work that really is just above them before we did any more in depth testing or assessment or anything like that. Then usually we would just arrange a home visit and go out with the SOLD and work with the student and have a discussion afterwards about what we feel is happening there. The SOLD is really terrific about going off and then finding resources that she feels might be appropriate and useful. And we would put together an initial program that we think might work and trial that and see how it goes. If it doesn't work we try something else.

Often the turn around time for work to be returned to the School of the Air for marking by the teacher can be as much as two weeks and it becomes difficult to monitor what is happening with students on a day-to-day basis. For the teachers of students that are experiencing learning difficulties it is important to maintain a strong line of contact with the Home Tutor so that feedback about the subtle changes in the way the students are working can be monitored. Without daily contact with the student a teacher cannot pick up the small steps of progress that have been made. This also provides an opportunity to monitor the way in which an IEP might be implemented in the home-school situation.

In Neville's situation I've asked the Home Tutor to fax me a brief report on the day's work at the end of each day. This is to assist the Home Tutor to stay on top of the organisation of things. It's really a means of helping the Home Tutor to focus on the organisational and timetabling aspects so that she and the Neville can work to them. And it's certainly paying off.

In spite of having some reservations about the actual creation of positions Pat feels that the School of the Air is extremely lucky to have the services of the Support Officer Learning Difficulties. The

collaborative model of the Support Officer Learning Difficulties position prohibits them from actually working with students and requires them to work through the teacher and Home Tutor. In Pat's view this organisation, in some instances, can be an inefficient use of teacher time.

Sometimes is just as practical to have somebody else who might be an expert in the field to be sitting down actually working with the child and going out and visiting them and monitoring their progress as much as this passing back of information second and third hand all the time. I just think there will be more scope for the SOLDs to work more effectively with the students if they were employed in a teaching position.

The effect that the Support Officer Learning Difficulties has had on Pat's day-to-day teaching role has been positive. He feels fortunate in being able to call upon the Support Officer Learning Difficulties's help when he has been confronted with a student who has difficulties that he feels he cannot initially meet.

The SOLD's terrific in responding and coming up with an initial program and I am really happy to keep that going if I feel it's working effectively. So it's terrific to have the resource right on the doorstep. I'm also wise enough to know that it may not be there for ever so I'm happy to embrace it while it is there and say, 'Hey, it makes my life easier!' Why should I feel guilty about that? So, it's terrific.

Since the Support Officer Learning Difficulties has been at the School of the Air there have also been changes that have occurred for the students. Often students with learning difficulties are perceived negatively and as a consequence there can be a stigma attached to those students identified as needing further support in their learning. Pat feels that this situation has been avoided at the School of the Air because of the way in which the stakeholders in any one case work together to devise programs of work which provide individual students with the success that they need to be able to continue learning.

I suppose there's both a perception and undoubtedly a reality that those problems are being addressed, so there's probably a greater comfort level for teachers and Home Tutors, and perhaps students alike. I don't think there's any stigma attached to a student working with the SOLD or doing a special program other than set work. A lot of set work is modified anyway so it's not like the stigma that might exist in a primary school where a student has been withdrawn or going off to see a specialist teacher for something. I think that's partly due to the way the SOLD works with the parents and the teachers. It really is a whole team approach. There is a greater level of comfort in terms of being able to deal with these problems when they arise and people are quite happy to discuss learning difficulties.

In Neville's case Pat sees that the work done has had a positive impact on the whole family. Initially Neville was behaving in a manner that was not only detrimental to his learning but also to his family relationships. Since working with the School of the Air staff and implementing the IEP

devised for him, Neville feels confident enough to attend the air lessons he previously would have avoided and the Home Tutor is able to provide positive daily feedback.

It was a case of Year Six boy behaving like a three-year-old. He was tantruming and spending the whole day just arguing the point with Mum. She was buying into it and they'd both be exhausted by the end of the day and no work would have been accomplished. We've tried to change that around by giving them a very simple program with a lot of structure to it and very achievable amounts of work. I think it's turning the situation around and they both seem a lot happier. That's taken out some of the elements that were causing a lot of friction between the family as a whole. So I think that's pretty positive.

Similarly the Home Tutors have responded positively to the implementation of the New Chidley model at the School of the Air. Pat has noticed that where initially Home Tutors were quick to condemn themselves for their students learning problems, they have come to recognise that there are many factors that contribute to this.

And I think we're helping to take away some of that self blame that Home Tutors might have gone through previously. And gradually they are beginning to realise that it's not their fault. By the same token if a student is performing well I always like to give accolades to the Home Tutor as well as the student.

The evaluation of students' IEPs is a task that the teacher and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties formally complete at the end of term. A team review of the student's progress is made from records and reports collated throughout the term, and a recommendation is made with regard to further programming. The Support Officer Learning Difficulties in turn reports to the Principal about the progress of individual students. A more informal approach is also taken where the teacher and the Support Officer Learning Difficulties adjust programs where necessary to ensure constant forward progress for the student.

One of the benefits of the New Chidley model is the high level of support that is available to teachers should they choose to take advantage of it. Pat feels that this certainly makes the job of catering to individual needs a lot easier. The same kind of high level of support is available to individual students and their families if they are willing to work in partnership with the School of the Air staff to implement a program of work designed specifically to meet the needs of the student. Pat wonders about the possibility of all primary schools having access to similar resources.

I do feel for other schools that don't have access to the same level of support that we do. Effectively what we've got with a school population of 40 students would be the equivalent of each class in a primary school having its own SOLD attached to the class and to a teacher, which is fairly unusual. So from that point of view, for the individual teacher it's fantastic.