

# Kindred

one family, one world

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happening  
to  
our girls?

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**ROCK!**

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are  
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your child  
**learn**

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Science:  
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**D**onna and her family lived on the North Coast of NSW for two years when things with her oldest daughter, Kaitlyn, reached a crisis point. A usually vibrant and happy girl, Kaitlyn was showing signs of depression. She was struggling with her schoolwork and having trouble fitting in with her peers at school. Kaitlyn did not want to go to school and there were regular arguments over homework. Though she was bright and creative, Kaitlyn often called herself stupid.

'It was as if her intelligence was locked inside her and we had lost the key. I had no idea how to help her, no amount of tutoring or help we gave her seemed to make any difference,' says Donna. 'I felt like we had failed her as parents. I knew we had to do something but had no idea what that something was.' Donna was concerned that Kaitlyn, now in Year 5, would not be able to cope with the academic workload of high school.

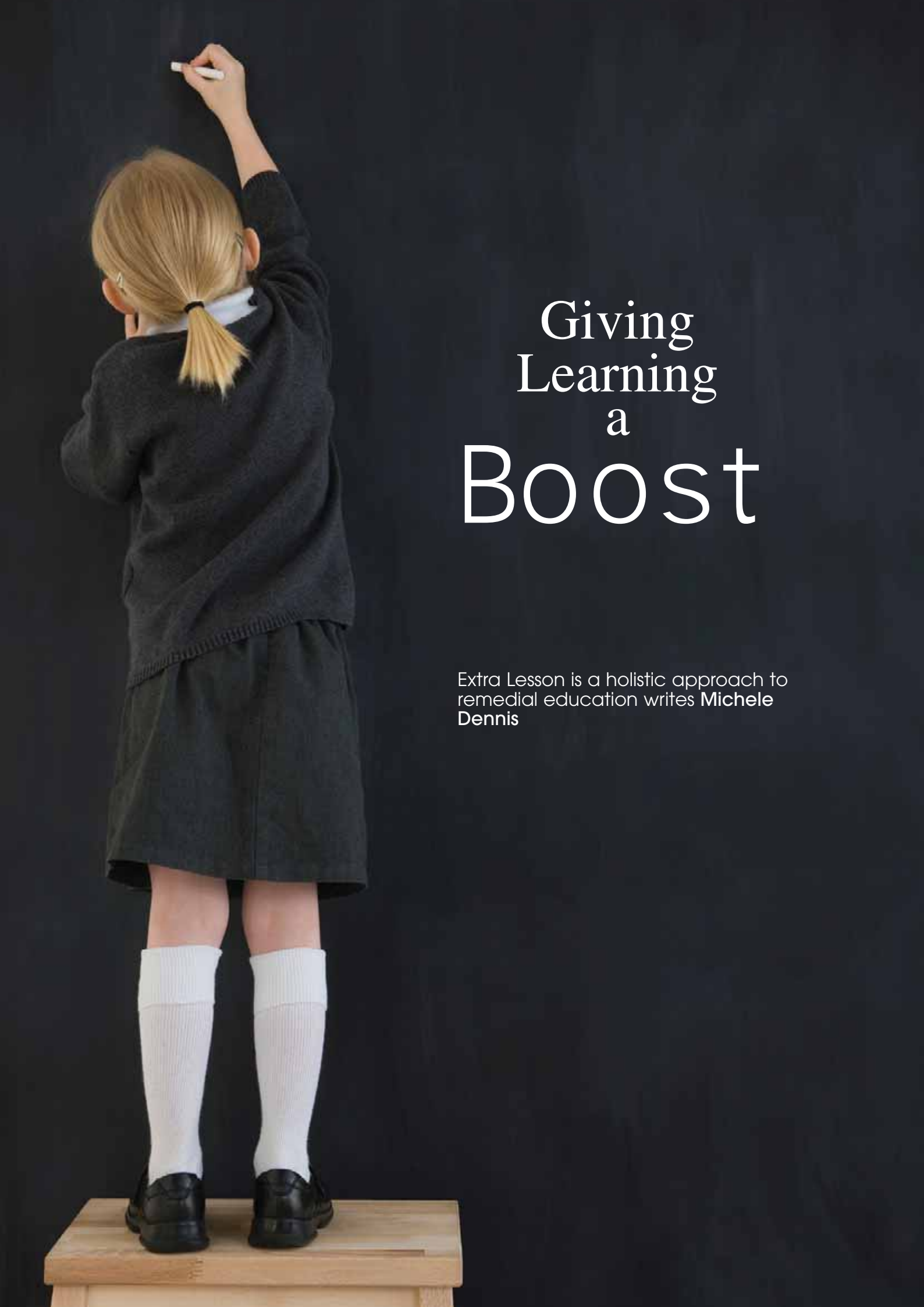
As a toddler, Kaitlyn was struggling with her speech. On her paediatrician's advice, Donna took her to a speech pathologist, which seemed to help. It was never mentioned that this could be part of a much larger issue.

Kaitlyn had struggled at her first school, a private school in the northern suburbs of Sydney. It was at this

school that a counsellor told Donna that Kaitlyn was experiencing learning difficulties. 'We were shocked and set out on an expensive and concerning journey, wading through a sea of professionals all claiming they could help,' says Donna.

When they moved to the North Coast, Donna decided on a Steiner school where she felt Kaitlyn would enjoy the focus on the arts. However, this shift didn't seem to help. Kaitlyn was unable to keep up with the other children. Her reading level was well below her age and it seemed almost impossible for her to do even the most basic maths problems. Donna took Kaitlyn to even more professionals and tutors. She was desperate to make things better for her daughter, to somehow take away the pain and frustration Kaitlyn felt every day. 'Eventually we could no longer drag Kaitlyn to any more appointments, it was starting to affect her confidence and school was such a challenge for her. So many tears were shed and frustration felt,' she says.

Because Kaitlyn was so unhappy at school Donna decided to home school her temporarily. She felt Kaitlyn would benefit from the one-on-one attention, hoping that she could help her with her reading and maths before she started at another school. Donna was very worried that Kaitlyn would be ostracised for

A young girl with blonde hair in a ponytail, wearing a dark grey school uniform, stands on a wooden block. She is holding a white marker and writing on a blackboard. The background is a solid dark grey.

# Giving Learning a Boost

Extra Lesson is a holistic approach to remedial education writes **Michele Dennis**

# Spirit of Learning

not being able to read at the same level as her peers and that would affect her already plummeting self-esteem.

It was at this point that Donna discovered the Extra Lesson. 'Julie recommended an initial consultation to evaluate Kaitlyn's situation. We were reluctant at first because of the thought of having to put Kaitlyn through all that again. Julie assured us that the initial assessment was not intimidating and Kaitlyn would most likely enjoy the experience. Eventually out of curiosity we attended.'

Julie explained that Extra Lesson is essentially a movement program where the students recapitulate the movements of early childhood. Learning difficulties can be experienced as a result of children not performing some of these movements in their early years. The movements of early childhood fire the neurons in the brain and prepare the child for academic learning later in life.

Donna taught Kaitlyn at home and brought her to Julie for weekly sessions. Special exercises were incorporated at home into their daily routine. 'Within months Kaitlyn's confidence grew and learning, reading and writing became easier for her,' says Donna. 'After six months of Extra Lesson and home schooling she went back to school and attended Year 6 at a small local school and thrived.'

Kaitlyn continued her weekly sessions with Julie for several months. When Kaitlyn finished her Extra Lesson program, her grades had improved dramatically, her self-confidence was back and she was happy to go to school. Donna feels grateful that her daughter no longer suffers daily, feeling challenged by activities that come easily to most children. 'Kaitlyn has just embarked on her second year at high school and we are so proud of her. As, Bs and Cs (nothing less) appeared on every page of her school report. Now that brings a smile to any parent's face but especially ours, as we have personally felt every challenge she has been faced with.'

## How The Extra Lesson works

The Extra Lesson is an assessment and intervention program originally

developed by Audrey McAllen in the UK and is based on the holistic developmental perspective of Rudolf Steiner's philosophy of education. Recent research is supporting the link between learning difficulties and development in early childhood.

The first seven years of the child's life are primarily focused on the physical and sensory development of the child and lay the foundations for all later academic learning and behaviour. When a child's early development and initial sensory learning experiences are disrupted, this can interfere with the subsequent development and learning as the child grows older. The analogy can be made of a house with faulty foundations, in that the house looks to be structurally sound; however, cracks in the walls may appear. If the child has 'faulty foundations' then later learning may require additional effort and the learning process for the child may not be an easy or enjoyable one.

Learning is a spontaneous process in most children that comes from curiosity, so a child who finds learning difficult or has to put in extra effort all the time may end up feeling frustrated and the end result is low self-esteem.

Common interferences to early child development include:

- Problems or accidents during pregnancy
- Difficult, prolonged, too quick, or interrupted birthing process
- Illness eg ear infections, tonsillitis or the need for a lot of antibiotics
- Time in a walker, jolly jumper or limited movement opportunities
- Excessive passivity eg lots of TV, Game Boy, computer games
- Trauma or emotional upset in the family life
- Adverse reactions to medication or immunisations
- Allergies and food sensitivities
- Post-natal depression
- Accidents in childhood

There are many other ways in which

early development can be disrupted and sometimes the cause is unknown and often the circumstances were unavoidable. The main focus is identifying what the developmental issues are for the student and doing something about these rather than focusing on the past that cannot be changed.

Some of the common characteristics of children or adolescents who could benefit from Extra Lesson are:

- Diagnosed as ADD, ADHD, dyspraxic, dyslexic, an auditory processing difficulty or as gifted and underachieving
- Performing below age level academically or in other areas, appears to be bright
- Avoiding reading and handwriting tasks
- Difficulty with social relationships
- Easily frustrated or blames others, anger attacks or outbursts
- Awkward or tight pencil grip, poor handwriting
- Skips lines when reading, loses place
- Reversals in handwriting/reading or reversals persisted longer than peers
- Easily distracted, short attention span
- Behaviour problems at home and/or school
- Disorganised and/or loses things
- Clumsy or accident-prone
- Poor balance, lack of co-ordination, low muscle tone, car sick as youngster
- Difficulty remembering or following instructions
- Appears not to listen (no hearing problems), needs things repeated, difficulty with phonetics
- Over-emotional or hypersensitive, mood swings
- Low self-esteem
- Confuses signs in maths
- Ambidextrous or mixed dominance for different tasks
- Difficulty learning or performing new tasks

Three or more of the above indicates that your child has some developmental difficulties and would benefit from an intervention such as Extra Lesson. Note that adolescents may have had some of the characteristics at an earlier age and have found ways to compensate.

Parents have found that children and adolescents with dyspraxia, dyslexia, ADD/ADHD, fine and gross motor problems, auditory processing, reading, maths, and spelling difficulties, have greatly benefited from doing Extra Lesson. There are numerous examples of children whose lives have improved dramatically through Extra Lesson.

A boy of 14 with ADHD symptoms, with the reading level of an eight-year-old and on the brink of suspension started Extra Lesson and after just one term was reading at his age level. By the end of three terms he was doing his homework and achieving good results at school. Home life had also improved dramatically. IQ testing before and after

his Extra Lesson program showed an increase from average to high average.

A dyslexic nine-year-old boy who was very withdrawn and reading at a six-year-old level was brought to Extra Lesson. After one year he had gained confidence in his schoolwork and was reading at his age level. His school report showed he had improved in all areas. He was also considered a popular and social member of his class.

A young boy of 12 was admitted to hospital, showing signs of being suicidal. He had been diagnosed with ADHD about four years prior to this. His mother reported that he had been disruptive at school since he began pre-school. He could not be left alone at home for fear that he would tip everything out of the fridge or empty all the products in the bathroom. He had to be under constant supervision. By the time he finished his Extra Lesson program he was doing well at school, participating in class, was no longer suicidal and his behaviour at home had greatly improved.

Parents often comment that they have been able to understand their child better and at last move forward. For children with attention problems, Extra Lesson provides the option of a 'drug-free' approach.

Extra Lesson is a holistic approach that provides an accurate picture of what developmental gaps exist in a child. It helps parents understand that their child is doing the best they can with the way they perceive the world. As parents it means you can let go of some of the frustration you have often been experiencing with a child that is not 'fitting into the system'. ■

*Michele Dennis lives on the far north coast of New South Wales where she works as an Extra Lesson practitioner. Michele's blog, **The Art of Parenting**, (see ad on page 50) offers practical advice to parents of children of all ages.*

*The Extra Lesson Association is celebrating 20 years of Extra Lesson in Australia by hosting a conference in Sydney 13-17 July 2009. For more information on the conference or to find an Extra Lesson Practitioner in your area go to [www.extralesson.com](http://www.extralesson.com)*



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