

“What the hell were you thinking?” The development of Philosophy at Hale School, Western Australia as an approach addressing curriculum differentiation for gifted students.

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When appointed to Hale School, Western Australia as Gifted and Talented Co-ordinator, the brief was simple: ‘Establish the best gifted programme you can, as quickly as possible!’ Using the enormous amount of research in gifted education as a reference point, the challenge did not seem to lie in identification, in provision, or monitoring – all of which the school was already doing well, rather the challenge lay in differentiation. Differentiation – the creation of a distinctly ‘different’ curriculum, tailored to the needs of gifted students was the real challenge. Using the Williams and Maker’s Models of Curriculum Differentiation, Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development, along with the (gifted-modified) Bloom’s Taxonomy, we sought to establish an initiative in Philosophy in the Senior School. Working closely as a team, the Challenge Programme Co-ordinator (Gifted Education) and key members of the Department of Philosophy, Values and Religion established a Philosophy Club, initiated the study of Philosophy as a subject, and created the ***Philosothon***, an inter-school competition, designed to allow gifted students from different schools and environments the opportunity to come together and participate in Communities of Inquiry facilitated by University Students and judged by academics from each of the Universities in the State. Additionally partnerships with other Philosophy Clubs have allowed a comparison of models and approaches, strengthening the club. The impact of these initiatives has been measurable within the school community and have demonstrably met the need for intellectual challenge of the gifted boys. As a Case Study in Differentiation, the development of Philosophy at Hale School has been an enormous success.

School Profile

The following information is taken directly from the school’s website: <http://www.hale.wa.edu.au> and edited for brevity.

Hale School is the oldest independent boys’ school in Western Australia. It was founded in 1858 by the first Anglican Bishop of Perth, Dr Mathew Blagden Hale, a clergyman, educator and social pioneer. The School, which was then known as ‘*The Bishop’s Collegiate School*’, opened its doors on 28 June 1858, with an initial enrolment of 22 students.

Situated in Wembley Downs on a magnificent 48 hectare site, it is located approximately 13 kilometres to the north-west of Perth and two kilometres from the coast in a high socio-economic area.

Hale School is an Anglican day and boarding school, offering primary and secondary education through to Tertiary Entrance Examination level. Whilst day scholars are enrolled from Year 1 to Year 12, boarders are normally accepted from Year 5 to Year 12.

Current enrolment numbers total 1,300, comprising 300 students in the Primary School (Years 1 to 7) and 1,000 in the Senior School (Years 8 to 12). Of this total there are 202 boarders, from various parts of Western Australia and other countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Dubai.

As a recent change to enrolment procedures, entry to Hale School is achieved following success in a testing process. Boarders, siblings of present students, and sons and grandsons of old boys are given preference in the process. The school's admission testing process is also used to select those students who will qualify for a scholarship, thus results of the process are an excellent indicator of ability. The testing process is administered by an independent educational consultancy, Australian Education Assessment Services (AEAS). AEAS is headquartered in Melbourne and has representatives in Perth and in most large centres in South East Asia.

Academic scholarships are available to boys entering Year 8. The School uses the ACER (Australian Council for Educational Research) Cooperative Scholarship Testing Program (CSTP) as its scholarship examination. This exam is written every year in April or May. Scholarships for the following year are awarded by mid-June. Last year, 93 boys were tested for 28 places and full and part scholarships are awarded on merit.

The school is a leader in Education in Western Australia. Academically powerful, the school ranks in the top 5 of the State's league tables each year. Additionally, the school has enormous strengths in music, sport, the arts, and drama, providing elite sportsmen for many state teams and a significant portion of the enrolments for art, music and drama courses at University, apart from boasting academic high flyers and business people in every year group of old boys. None-the-less, Hale does not rest on its laurels and the school pursues excellence with passion and commitment. Over one hundred external competitions, tests, and extension activities are offered at Hale Senior School each year, ensuring that the needs of able and very high ability students are met within the 'normal' school offering.

The development of the gifted and talented education at Hale School

The Hale School Challenge Programme was developed as an initiative of the Gifted and Talented Committee, comprised of key Teachers and members of the Executive. The Committee endorsed a vision for Academic Educational Excellence at Hale School. This vision included the establishment of a whole school Gifted and Talented Education Programme – the Challenge Programme – charged with identifying and nurturing gifted boys; the appointment of two Challenge Programme Co-ordinators, who working as a team across the Junior and Senior Schools would initiate, support and develop gifted education in both groups; and the utilisation of the *UNSW, GERRIC (Gifted Education Research Resource and Information Centre) Professional Development Package for Teachers* as the theoretical base which would underpin the programme.

Senior School Challenge Programme Establishment Plan

The Gagné Model of Gifted Education (Gross et al, 2005, Core Module 1 p. 3), along with a number of other theoretical Models, was selected as the underlying theory 'driving' programme structure and pedagogy. Thus, in response to this model, programme initiation included *Identification, Provision, and Monitoring* and creatively addressed extension, enrichment, acceleration and staff and parent development. The aims of the programme included encouraging the participation of gifted boys in all current school extension/enrichment activities, and the provision of additional opportunities for their academic and intellectual engagement. In the years since programme initiation, considerable emphasis has also been placed on the support of the social and emotional needs of the gifted and talented and the provision of support for the teachers and parents of such boys. Extension, enrichment and acceleration are managed within faculties, with around 150 competitions, activities, mentor programmes, and similar opportunities offered to the gifted boys each year.

In 2007, with the programme established and 85 boys identified, a review identified 'differentiation' as the 'gap' in programme offering. Using Core Module 5A (*UNSW GERRIC Professional Development Package for Teachers*) as a guide to the approach, key staff discussed strategies to differentiate across the school. "Essentially, the aim of differentiating instruction is to maximize each student's growth by meeting each student where he or she is and helping the student to progress. In practice, it involves offering several different learning experiences in response to students' varied needs". (Kiernan, L. (1996), cited in Gross, M.U.M., MacLeod, B., Bailey, S., Chaffey, G., Merrick, C. & Targett, R. (2005) p.9) Core Module 5A details the William's Model (1993), one effective strategy for Curriculum Development across all subject areas. This complex model is encapsulated in the following diagram, and while not originally designed for gifted education, is ideal for 'developing thinking and feeling processes' (Davis & Rimm, 1989, p. 177) and thus

integrates most effectively with Kohlberg's Model of Moral Development, which was also developed with a group of boys over a period of twelve years (Davis & Rimm, 1989, p. 190):

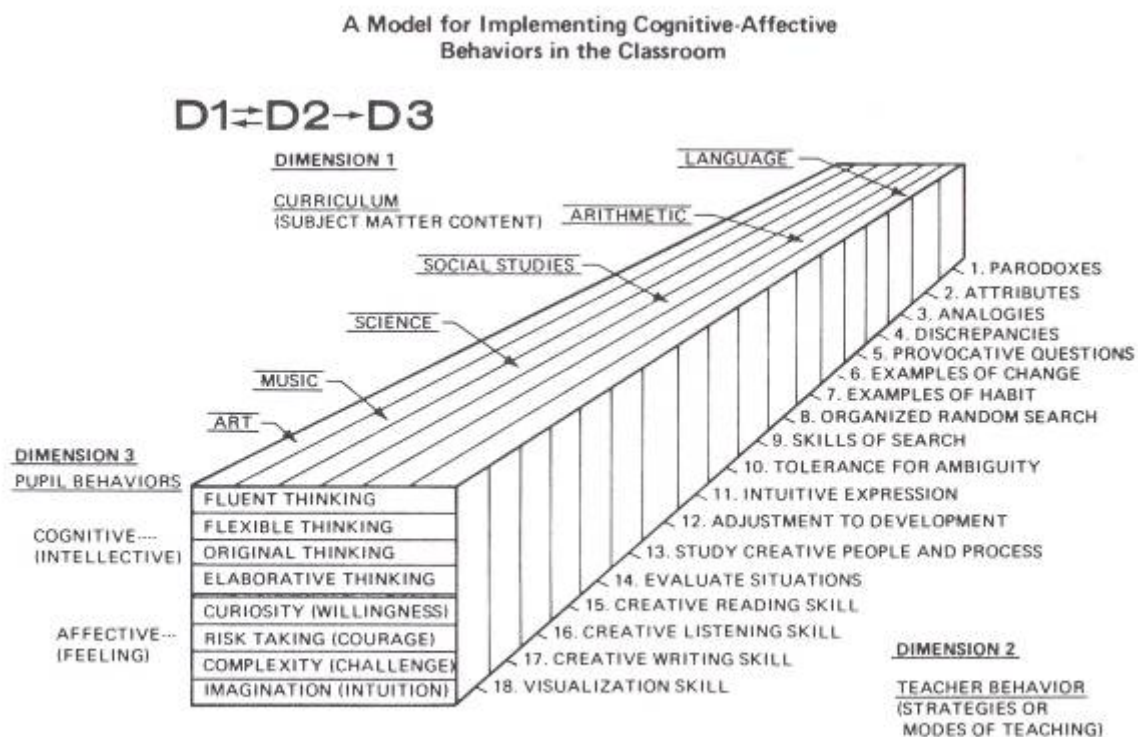


FIGURE 8.5 The Williams Model.

(taken from Davis, G.A, Rimm, S.A. (1989) Education of the Gifted and Talented, p. 178.)

The *GERRIC Professional Development Package for Teachers* (2005, p. 10 & 11) details curriculum modifications suggested by Maker (1982) which include content, process, product and learning environment modifications. In utilisation of the package, the Junior School Co-ordinator, Sara Thorpe, had initiated a Philosophy Café to promote higher order thinking processes and promote creative and critical thinking. This initiative was continued into the Senior School in 2007, in a partnership between the Challenge Programme and the Department of Philosophy, Values and Religion. While differentiation was the planned focus, the second aim was to promote moral reasoning amongst the student body. An all-boys school with an emphasis on Christian values, the school's pastoral care process is constantly seeking to encourage community cohesion, and staff and student leaders within the community actively take ownership of the on-going development of moral reasoning. Braggett (1996, p. 163) in his book "Differentiating Programs for Secondary Schools; Units of Work for Gifted and Talented Students" also endorses Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Judgement as a 'well known approach' in differentiation which addresses the development of social values. Braggett maintains that "educators may contribute to [the development of moral reasoning] through the approach they adopt". Any process of moral reasoning requires students to utilize Bloom's Taxonomy and encourages logical, but flexible thinking.

Philosophy Café/Club

While Hale School has long demonstrated commitment to the development of philosophical thought, real enthusiasm for the organisation of a structured study of Philosophy and the development of the Community of Inquiry Model was stimulated by the announcement of the introduction of a new Western Australian Curriculum Council designed upper school course in Philosophy, to be commenced in 2008. Determined to inspire students to select the new course, while simultaneously providing a differentiated curriculum, a Club (or Café), was begun. The first meetings were called in lunchbreaks, with a call to interested students to attend advertised in the school's daily 'Bulletin'. The work of the Junior School Co-ordinator became very evident when a number of year 8 and 9 students – Café 'enthusiasts' from the Junior School - attended along with some interested upper school students. The first meeting, advertised as the establishment of the club, drew a large crowd of over forty students.

The process used in the Club discussions is a "Community of Inquiry" model. This is a model initiated by Professor Matthew Lipman, the founder of the Philosophy for Children movement, and it is a major component of the new WA Philosophy and Ethics course. The West Australian Curriculum Council Course of Study Outline states:

"a philosophical Community of Inquiry at its simplest is a collaborative and co-operative pedagogical strategy through which students learn with others, and from others, how to engage in Philosophical discourse. Such discourse seeks to clarify, analyse, evaluate and define concepts and issues so as to help students understand and deal with complex questions raised by popular culture, by contemporary events and by the history of ideas. A community of philosophical inquiry uses the skills of critical reasoning to help students deal more effectively and tolerantly with disagreement."

(http://www.curriculum.wa.edu.au/internet/_Documents/April_PD/2008_16115_3.doc)

Searching for additional information on the Community of Inquiry Model, we found the Tasmanian Education Dept website to be most helpful in the development of the Club's approach to discussion. The Community of Inquiry model dovetails effectively into the William's Model of Differentiation, as the approach encourages fluent, flexible, original and elaborative thinking, and utilises paradoxes, attributions and provocative questioning as an inherent aspect of the process.

From the first Inquiry, headed up 'Do computers think?' a regular twice weekly meeting of the club has become the practice. From this first small group of boys, the club has expanded rapidly. This year, a

leadership group, comprising one representative per year group, one representative from each of the year 10 and year 11 Philosophy classes, and headed up by a Year 12 Captain or Chair, meets regularly. This leadership group has been encouraged to take ownership for the Club, and in regular meetings sponsor ideas to shape future directions, and generate topics for each semester's Communities of Inquiry.

The intention has been to generate 'wicked problems' into which the students inquire. A wicked problem is a term coined by Horst Rittel (a pioneering theorist at the University of California, Berkeley) and refers to problems which are messy and circular. "Wicked problems have incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements; and solutions to them are often difficult to recognize because of complex interdependencies." (1973, p. 155) Rittel stated that when one attempts to solve a wicked problem, the solution of one of its aspects may reveal or create another, even more complex problem or problems. He contrasts 'wicked problems with "tame" problems in science, mathematics, chess, or puzzle solving. Philosophy deals with "wicked" problems such as two of the Club's most recent Inquiries: *What is the nature of identity?* and *Are humans disposable?* The challenging discussions which are triggered by wicked problems are ideal activities in response to the William's Model of Curriculum Differentiation, Bloom's Taxonomy and this discussion process can assist the student's progress through Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Reasoning.

Thus, during the lunch sessions of the club, students grapple with 'wicked problems' such as "The trolley problem" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trolley_problem). Advertised beforehand in the School's Bulletin, and on the website, these sessions attract a regular group of students and week by week, a shifting club population attend whenever they can find the time around their other commitments. These students have inquiring minds and are eager to dissect 'wicked problems'.

The tyranny of time has resulted in us splitting the sessions over two lunch times, devoting the first to formulating crafted questions and on the second to conducting a Community of Inquiry on the topic. We have used technology effectively, as the questions are placed on a discussion forum and then the discussion is videoed and also placed on the school's internal portal forum (an internal school information technology network). Thereby the club can continue and conduct a community of inquiry online. A sometimes, quite vigorous discussion, may continue for days in examination of the questions, sometimes heading off on tangents, allowing the boys to challenge assumptions and values. As this forum is on an internal (and thus private) network, we (as teachers) avoid moderation of these comments, and allow the internal leadership of the club to deal with inappropriate interactions. This allows us to avoid censorship and encourage the boys to take responsibility for the impact of their interactions. The added benefit of the club is that it allows 'like minded peers' to interact, regardless of their age, with an accelerated 11 year old

boy vigorously (and very effectively) engaging with a year 11 or 12 student while discussing theories of existentialism. As the group fondly view themselves as 'oddballs', their interaction allows the development of social skills as their jokes and ideas are accepted and validated within the Club. (Gross et al, 2005, Module 6, p. 4)

The Philosothon

As an extension of the Club, the idea of a 'Philothon' blossomed, when in July 2007 I, as the Gifted and Talented Coordinator at Hale School, approached the Head of Philosophy, Values and Religion, Matthew Wills, with the idea of creating an inter-school Philosophy competition. As has been previously mentioned, I was casting around for opportunities to extend the differentiation initiatives being encouraged in each subject area. I had recently participated in an interschool Spellathon (organised by Brad Hilliard, then at Wesley College) with a team of boys and had observed their pleasure in interacting socially and competitively with other gifted students. When I saw and heard Gagne speak in January 2006, I had been very interested by his comments on the value of the acquisition of knowledge and the need for competition, for gifted students. I had also noted my students' enjoyment of the thrill of competition with other 'like minds', and had discussed with Brad the need to provide opportunities for the gifted to interact with their peers at other schools. Having in mind the social and competitive needs of gifted children, the aim of promoting higher order thinking in the school and seeing an opportunity for the promotion of the new Philosophy and Ethics course, I proposed an inter-school Philosophy 'competition'. From there the hard work began as we put together an event which, despite being generated in a very tight timeline, was in the end, a great success.

I should acknowledge an inherent problem with this event at the outset, as Lipman's model fosters a sense of collective philosophical inquiry in order to come to a shared understanding. A competition between schools seemed a strange way of promoting "a shared understanding". However, we were determined to persevere feeling that we needed to strongly communicate that the emphasis was less on the competition elements and more on the shared understanding. The William's Model of Differentiation does, however, encourage an approach which includes complexity and challenge. We wanted our students to share this experience but felt that, without a competitive element, it would be very difficult to ensure participation from a large group of schools. Encountering resistance to the concept of competition linked to philosophical thought, we proposed using the Community of Inquiry Model used in the WA Curriculum Council course, and as a 'measurement' of performance, the planned assessment structure and model used in that course. It seemed to us that if the Curriculum Council and the Universities were able to measure and rank students

in a course of Philosophy, we should be able to modify their measurement tools and utilise their trained scholars in evaluating the performance of teams from various schools. Despite some reservations we persevered and found during the competition, that the discussions were rich and collaborative.

We invited schools to send teams of five students, one student each from years 8, 9, 10, 11 and one 'reserve'. There were to be two rounds of competition. These students would initially compete in Communities with students of their own year group, but in the second round the Communities would be mixed up and thus allow students to interact with students who may be their intellectual, but not necessarily, age peers. Students would be evaluated individually by the judges observing the discussion, points awarded on an individual basis and then each student's points would be contributed to a team score. The collective total would allow us to select a 'winning team', while the individual scores and judges comments would allow us to recognise outstanding philosophical thinking or perhaps generosity as a Community member.

This plan included developing Communities of 10 students, each from a different school team, all of whom had opportunity to read the preparatory information supplied to schools, well in advance of the competition. Some discussion had taken place in their own school situation and from this they had generated questions which had previously been returned to the Competition organisers. These questions would provide the basis for the Community of Inquiry discussion in competition. These questions were placed on whiteboards before the competition and used to initiate the inquiry, which was facilitated by a University student and judged by a University academic. Each round of the competition involved two separate half hour inquiries, each on a previously supplied topic using the questions generated before competition.

The topics were:

Does God exist?

Do humans have free will?

What is the nature of the human mind?

Is it morally worse to actively kill a person than to passively allow that person to die?

One of the challenges, for us as organisers, was to recruit a number of qualified facilitators who would direct the discussion and ensure equity of opportunity for involvement and manage any inappropriate interactions. Additionally, as one judge was required per community, a large number of judges would be necessary, and with that, a concern regarding moderation immediately developed. In order to ensure equity, I contacted each of the Universities in the state and asked academics to nominate to act as judges.

Fortunately all those contacted were enthusiastic and prepared to be involved. From this group, I was also able to secure a list of post-graduate students who would be prepared to participate as facilitators. The two groups were 'trained' for their roles prior to the competition. We invited the WA Curriculum Council Officer, Dr Raymond Dreihuis to act as Chair of the Judging panel, and to prepare and moderate a judging process. The judges were briefed both before and after the competition to ensure they shared a solid understanding of the criteria, and would be comparable in their judgements.

In terms of the process of recruitment of competitor schools, we initially contacted other local Perth secondary schools and discussed our idea. A total of ten schools were enthusiastic and accepted the invitation to participate, Methodist Ladies College, Christchurch Grammar, St Hilda's AGS, John Septimus Roe ACS, Penrhos College, Wesley College, Perth College, Guilford Grammar and St Mary's AGS. We asked them to prepare a team of 5 students each. The competitive nature of independent schools no doubt helped in the process of attracting schools to enter the competition. Additionally, the relative simplicity of their management process allowed our invitation to be forwarded to the appropriate person quickly.

Matthew Wills, our Head of Philosophy, Values and Religion, prepared various resources packages of 'trigger materials' including a section from Professor Richard Dawkins book; "The God Delusion", passages from John Stuart Mill, On Liberty and the Subjection of Women (1879 ed.), and a CD presentation from Peter Singer on Euthanasia. Students received this material about a month before the Philosothon. Trophies were designed and medallions were ordered – with particular attention given to the symbolic significance of each of the awards and we set up a website for the event www.philosothon.org inviting professional associations and similar groups to be involved. A number of groups and individuals chose to participate, providing sponsorship in the way of individual prizes and endorsements. In particular, The Association for Philosophy in Schools (APIS, <http://www.philosophywa.com/>) provided enormous support and encouragement.



On the 7th November 2007 nine teams of five students from each of the participating schools, came together in the John Invererity Music and Drama Centre at Hale School. Following a light meal and drinks, participants, their teachers and parents gathered for introductions and a detailed outline of the format. They then divided the Community of Inquiry groups for discussion.

There was a short break between the first two and the final two discussions. A magnificent trophy was awarded to the winning school at the end of the evening and medals were awarded to various categories. All students received a certificate to honour their selection to represent their school. From all reports the evening was a great success and to our surprise, the Hale team won the event. The medal winners were; Robert Gillam (Year 8) from Hale School who won the Curtin Centre for Applied Ethics and Philosophy prize & Hugh Edwards (Year 8) from Christchurch Grammar received the Haynes Prize which is awarded by the Association for Philosophy in Schools.



The winning team with proud parents who observed the Communities of Inquiry

One of the strengths of this initiative is that it is a collaborative involvement between the Tertiary Sector and Secondary school sector. Discussions were facilitated by PhD students in Philosophy from Uni of WA, and Murdoch Universities and closely watched by the judging panel. The final judging panel consisted of University academics in Philosophy, Dr Nic Damnjanovic, (UWA), Dr Felicity Haynes (UWA), Dr Alan Tapper (Chairman of APIS), Dr Richard Hamilton (Notre Dame University) and Chair of the Judges Dr Raymond Driehuis (WA Curriculum Council Officer for Philosophy and Ethics). They were all very impressed at the standard and quality of the discussion, and prepared an extensive report on the strengths and weaknesses evident in the discussion, which was distributed to the teams.



Some of the Judges and the facilitators

In searching for similar event to this one, I came across a “The Ethics Bowl” which occurs in the USA. The event is managed in a similar format but involves the discussion of specific ethical situations and is open only to University Colleges. More information can be found at the Ethics Bowl website. This event has now run for several years and its growth in the US has been extraordinary. Having started with a small group of colleges it now consists of 32 regional centres and culminates each year with a regional final.

In 2008, fourteen WA schools have booked in for the Hale School Philosothon which is scheduled for October. This includes three state schools which of course we are eager to see participate. We have been able to list the event on the school’s calendar for the next two years and with the development of the Club, it will ideally, become an annual event.

Matthew Wills has also documented the development of the Philosothon from his perspective as a leader in the teaching of Philosophy and Ethics. His articles and reports are invaluable for teachers initiating the new course in their schools. (Wills (a), 2008, p. 41; Wills (b), 2008, p. 139)

Philosophy Camp

In developing the Club further, we have most recently established a partnership with St Hilda’s Anglican Girls School’s, ***Philosophers in Action Club*** to run a Philosophers’ Camp. In order to further promote the development of interest generally in Philosophy and Philosophy as a legitimate subject area in the curriculum, we intend to run a weekend camp for students. The two leadership groups have met, and negotiated a camp programme, developing a good balance of disciplined discussion and social interaction. University mentors connected to the Philosothon have offered to attend and guest speakers have also been invited. One of the sessions has been set aside to debate the approaches of each club – Hale’s

academic approach to Philosophy, and St Hilda's practical approach. The proposed date for the Philosophy camp is Saturday 2nd & Sunday 3rd August 2008.

The 2007 Philosothon has also spawned other initiatives. A weekly series of Philosophy Club meetings, a Philosophy Camp, guest Philosophers visiting the school, and various other initiatives. One of the most gratifying to see is the interest from the staff of the school. Two maths teachers have attended club events and participated in the discussions, an English teacher attends regularly and a Physical Education Specialist is scheduled as a guest speaker'. Dr Nic Damjanovic, a University of Western Australia academic in Philosophy, and an 'old boy', visited the School and spoke on the value of a study of Philosophy as a career choice.

The utilisation and application of the William's and Maker's Models of Differentiation, and Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Reasoning have inspired the development of a unique approach to the study of Philosophy at Hale School. This has been tremendously enriching for both the school and individual students. It has allowed us to modify the learning environments and create the opportunity for flexible, open, independent and intrinsic learning. It has also allowed us to initiate complex and abstract thinking, in a collaborative and co-operative environment. There is also a growing body of evidence to suggest that encouraging collective philosophical discussion has measurable educational benefits for students enhancing their intellectual, social and emotional intelligence. While we have definitely observed such benefits, at the very least the development of Philosophy at Hale School has shown us the incredible depth of understanding which students possess, often despite their age. The profundity of their insights never ceases to astound us. This process has also allowed us the unique opportunity to gather gifted students together, and encourage them to interact with their peers and to engage in original thinking in environments of supportive challenge.

Further information can be obtained by emailing me on lao@hale.wa.edu.au

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