

Thinking expedition for our students

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A GROUP of local students will be giving their brains a good workout in June when they take part in an Olympics for the mind.

For the first time, four local students will be representing Australia at the Fifth International Mind Lab Olympics being held in Hungary .

This three-day educational event attracts 48 students from 12 countries to compete in thinking games.

Mind Lab is a learning tool that uses specially designed board games to enhance cognitive skills.

Students are taught the “stoplight method”, which focuses on decision-making, and the “detective method”, which teaches problem-solving while playing board games.

The four local students, all aged 12, are from Wilderness School and Scotch College.

Wilderness students Annabel, 11, and Emma, 11, have been teamed up with Scotch students Oscar, 12, and Ella, 12, and are receiving extra tuition as a group and separately before the games begin.

Wilderness teacher Katherine Zollo said thinking skills learnt in Mind Lab were applied in the traditional curriculum.

She said Mind Lab taught students to work strategically and develop cognitive skills such as problem-solving, decision-making and drawing conclusions which could be transferred into specific subjects such as mathematics.

“They are not just going into a lesson playing games. They are going into a lesson learning about the game, stopping, talking about the strategic play and methods that are used and seeing how they can be transferred into a real-life situation,” she said.

Scotch middle school head Howard MacPherson said the school trialled the Mind Lab system in 2008, and used simple game-playing strategies to teach creative thinking, problem-solving and teamwork skills to students.

Staff noticed that the levels of communication between students increased.

There were initial concerns that they could not fit Mind Lab into students’ busy timetables, and how it would integrate into various curriculum areas.

“One concern was that they could not get through their other courses, events such as national testing week, (excursions) and school camp,” he said.

“They were in no doubt about the worth



LET THE GAMES BEGIN: The Scotch and Wilderness students prepare for competition.

of the lessons, but were concerned about the lack of time for attending to the teacher resources and for refresher time... for feedback.”

Mind Lab was first developed in Israel in the early 1990s.

Scotch College student Oscar said Mind Lab games were better than playing video games and had become the favourite lesson for many of his peers.

He said playing games had taught him

how to stop and think and he used these skills in his narrative writing.

Wilderness student Annabel said it was a fun way to learn how to concentrate and was looking forward to the challenge of competing. She was confident the team had a good chance of winning if they focused, tried hard and did their best.

“It’s not about the rules. It’s about the way you move the pieces and the way you think of how to do it,” she said.