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&
PAM LYONS

La Trobe University's ***Able Learners***
Enrichment Program: An innovation in
regional Australia

'Rising Tides' Gifted and Talented Conference
Wellington, New Zealand
August 2006

MICHAEL

My Background

10 years at a regional campus of La Trobe with the Faculty of Education

Previously, 25 years in school education: as a teacher, school principal, and in school and student support services, with most of this time as a school psychologist.

Maintain a private psychology practice which includes child assessments in conjunction with counselling work with parents of able learners / gifted children

PAM

My background

Coordinator of the *Able Learners' Enrichment Program* at La Trobe University

Victorian Director of the *Australian Association for the Education of Gifted and Talented*

Committee member of the *Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented*

I have run support groups for parents and teachers of gifted children since 1998, in Melbourne as well as in country areas, providing information, education and activities.

- **The Context of the *Able Learners' Enrichment Program (ALEP)***
- **The Nature of the ALEP**
 - (a) Rationale
 - (b) Dimensions

- **Participant Views**
 - (i) Parents
 - (ii) Children
 - (iii) ALEP Tutors
 - (iv) Wider Community
- **Reflections, Implications and Considerations**

“ Sydney or the Bush ”

- Despite its vast land mass, Australia with 20.5 million people is one of the most urbanised nations (80 - 85 % of the population live in urban areas).
- The main population centres cluster along the narrow fertile strip on the eastern and southern coast.

• CITY POPULATIONS

- Sydney 4.2
- Melbourne 3.5
- Brisbane 1.7
- Perth 1.3
- Adelaide 1.0
- Gold Coast 0.6
- Newcastle 0.5
- Hobart 0.4
- **Canberra 0.3**

Total 13.3 M
(65%)

- **Bendigo 0.1**



NORTHERN TERRITORY

QUEENSLAND

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

NEW SOUTH WALES

AUSTRALIA

EDITION 1

Simple Conic Projection



2000 1500 1000 500 200 0 300
 Heights and depths are shown in metres

Populated places

- Greater than 1 000 000
- 100 000 - 1 000 000

- Road, principal
- Selected railway

- River, perennial
- River, non-perennial

Educational Disadvantage in Australia

- There is considerable research evidence in Australia of a strong geographical dimension to child disadvantage, a key dimension of which is **spatial living location**: specifically, living in *regional, rural and remote area communities*.

Non-School Qualifications for People Aged 25-64 (2001)

Highest Non -School Qualification	Major Cities	Inner Region	Outer Region	Remote	Very Remote
Postgraduate Degree or Diploma	5.7	3.2	2.5	2.5	2.4
Bachelor Degree	15.5	9.5	8.4	8.2	7.4
Advanced Diploma	8.5	7.2	6.4	6.1	5.5
Certificate	19.1	22.7	21.2	20.8	18.1
TOTAL	48.8	42.6	38.6	37.5	33.3

The Australian Government's 2001 Senate Report :

“ The Education of Gifted Children”

- Negative attitudes and mistaken beliefs about gifted children persist across the Australian community
- Concerns about inadequacies in pre-service teacher preparation relating to gifted and talented learners.
- Teachers lacking specific training about child giftedness are more likely to identify children from the dominant culture, than from minority or underprivileged groups,which includes young people from regional and rural areas .



The research on the gifted and talented in regional and rural Australia

- The Australian research is limited !
- Faulkner (2006) Teacher and parent nominations of gifted children from small communities in central Victoria (forthcoming)
- Chalmers (2004) Gifted and talented programs in six Victorian rural schools

How do Pre-Service Teachers View Gifted Students : A NSW Study

(Carrington and Bailey, 2000)

- Questionnaire surveys of 1,384 pre-service teachers, (776 primary entrant teachers) from 5 universities (urban and rural) about the 'teaching desirability' of students
- Subjects presented with short identikit descriptions encompassing possible combinations of gifted / average, studious / non-studious, and male / female,

Results :

- For primary pre-service teachers, there were significant main effects for ability and effort (at .0001 level), but not for gender.
- Three way interaction effects between these three variables were significant at 0.05 level.
- For secondary pre-service teachers, there was a significant main effect for effort (.0001 level) but no main effect for gender or ability.

How do Pre-Service Teachers View Gifted Students

A NSW Study : Teacher Desirability Rankings

(Carrington and Bailey, 2000)

PRIMARY TEACHERS

- **Average Non-studious male**
- **Average Non studious female**
- **Average Studious female**
- **Gifted Non Studious female**
- **Average Studious male**
- **Gifted Non Studious male**
- **Gifted Studious male**
- **Gifted Studious female**

SECONDARY TEACHERS

- **Gifted Non studious female**
- **Average Non Studious male**
- **Gifted Non Studious male**
- **Average Non Studious female**
- **Average Studious female**
- **Gifted Studious male**
- **Average Studious male**
- **Gifted Studious female**

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (LZW) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.



LA TROBE

UNIVERSITY, BENDIGO

Opportunity for excellence

- Rationale for the ***Able Learners Enrichment Program***

- At its heart, the ALEP is an out-of-school enrichment program oriented to able learners and children with special abilities in regional and rural areas of northern Victoria.
- Its objective is to create the conditions for these children to have fun learning with others of similar ability *in a university setting*. For these children, the social enrichment and the expansion of their personal and social horizons is just as important as the challenging and engaging learning tasks they undertake.
- For some children, these programs provide something that they do not get in their usual lives.



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Opportunity for excellence

- Rationale for the ***Able Learners Enrichment Program***

- An opportunity for the parents of children participating in the workshops to learn about aspects of child giftedness and children with special abilities, and how they can most effectively parent and support their children.
- An opportunity for parents to meet and network with the parents of other able learners.
- It is a way of making a link between the university and the wider regional community.



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Opportunity for excellence

- Rationale for the ***Able Learners Enrichment Program***

- Since 2005, La Trobe students taking gifted education subjects participate in the ALEP, giving them an opportunity to workshop their teaching skills with a group of able learners.
- The ALEP is a way of ‘grounding’ and contextualising the reading, lectures, seminars of the semester long- study unit.
- For these beginning teachers, we seek to create circumstances where in pairs, they plan their workshop, then observe, teach, interact with with a small group of able learners, and, ... have fun.



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What does the research say about the risks for gifted and talented whose educational needs go unacknowledged ?

- Boredom and under-stimulation
- Underachievement
- Risk of developing maladaptive challenging behaviour, and life patterns
- Early school leaving and reduced opportunities
- Alienation and psychological problems
- The loss of natural abilities and existing or nascent talent to the wider community



- **The Development of *The Able Learners Enrichment Program* since 2000**
- Beginnings
- Funding support 2004 (Australian Telstra Community Development Fund)
- Since 2005, a participation requirement of final year B. Ed. studies electives in gifted education (also M. Ed. students)

- Who are the children who attend the ALEP workshops, how do they come to participate, and where do they come from?

Are you still
with us ?
Questions
please !!

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Parent Comments on the value of the ALEP parent Information sessions

- I really enjoyed *finally* meeting people (parents and guest speakers) who understand what I feel (P11)
- Have only attended one session, and found it very interesting : lots of information and web-sites to research to help cope with behaviour etc. Felt comfortable being in the same boat as other parents. It was great to hear other parents' similar concerns. P 3

Parent Comments on the value of the ALEP parent Information sessions

- The information sessions are useful, but the level of information about the topic is irrelevant if teachers have little knowledge in the area. (P 7)
- We need all the help we can get (P 15)
- Very informative - obtained some great hints and insights (P 10)

Parent Comments on the value of the ALEP parent Information sessions

- Excellent ! Keep them coming !. It would be good to have small group workshops for parents which would allow for discussion of personal cases. (P11)
- Please keep up the ALEP. I would be interested in attending short affordable courses, learning about giftedness and supporting gifted individuals. (P 8)

What do you think your child gained from the ALEP workshop ?

- “My child enjoys attending. The challenge and enjoyment is something totally different.” (P1)
- “ She really enjoyed extending her interests, as for example, ‘Latin with a focus on Harry Potter’ She was interested in both aspects of the program and came home and worked on the homework sheets. Contact with like minds was stimulating for her.” (P2)

- “My child gained acceptance, friends, and stimulation that isn’t in the current education system.”
(P 13)
- Jason really enjoyed participation in the ALEP. As the mother of a child with Aspergers, I liked the way he worked with another boy, and going back to the car, he was saying goodbye to others in the group.” (P5)

What do you think your child gained from the ALEP ?

- The opportunity to mix with other able learners - my child attends a small school where these opportunities are limited. (P 7)
- My child gained acceptance, friends and stimulation that isn't in the current school system. (P 23)

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Reflective comments by the La Trobe students (2)

The Pasta making workshop 2005

“I was intrigued to see a girl of 7 years sitting at her desk knitting while she waited for the pasta to cook. Her response to my question about the knitting was, *‘I take it with me, and use it if I need to fill in time’*

What a practical solution! I wondered how receptive a teacher would be to a child knitting in class!”



Reflective comments by the La Trobe student ALEP tutors (6) The 'Engineering' workshop 2006

Our workshop incorporated the notions of science and engineering in a construction project using simple materials and consisted of a class of seventeen able learners.

I thought that several social issues may arise and the students may not get along or not really extend into developing new relationships. However these concerns were quickly put aside as the students got along exceptionally well, and were able to work and communicate with others who had been complete strangers to them prior to the day.”



Reflective comments by the La Trobe student ALEP workshop tutors (1).

The Bushrangers workshop 2005

“ It was great to see these kids really enjoying themselves and it was obvious that they had chosen the topic because it was something that they were really interested in. *Those kids taught me more about bushrangers that day than I had known previously!*”

One thing that I noticed about these kids was that they all got along quite well considering they had never met each other before.”



Reflective comments by the La Trobe student ALEP tutors. (3)

The 'Acting Up' workshop 2005

- “I was surprised at how well they were able to work on their own with minimal assistance from myself or from my partner so when it came to the final activity for the day, we were able to alter the plan and allow the students to work on their own, which ended up with them being able to make up their own play and present their own version of a fairytale to an audience.

If I was conducting another workshop, I now know that I can afford to be more flexible in my planning, to allow for some independent learning time etc for the students, as they seem to appreciate this. Also, the vast range of personalities has shown me that no two gifted children will ever be the same.”



Reflective comment by the La Trobe B. Ed. ALEP workshop tutors.(5)

The 'Do You believe in Aliens' Workshop 2005

“As preparation for our class (on the possibilities of extraterrestrial life), one child (in our 7- 9 years group) had already researched current views of life on Mars while others in the group thought more conventionally of cartoon space monsters. This experience brought home *the importance of being flexible in both your definition of giftedness and the provision of learning experiences for gifted and talented children.*

One of our activities that had been tried successfully by my fellow presenter with a grade 5/6 class fell completely flat. We had planned a role-playing activity trying to communicate with an alien. One boy could not get past the idea that the only realistic aliens would be algae or bacteria, and communication with them would be impossible, Another found it (the activity) too boring because he had been looking forward to discussing all the possibilities of what and where extraterrestrial life may be.”



Reflective comments by the La Trobe student ALEP tutors (5) The 'Language' workshop 2006

- It was great to see that as they were all of reasonably the same level and interests, they socialized really well and actually surprised me how mature they were by using their manners all the time, listening to you, etc.

We had one activity where students had to talk about a specific topic for about a minute. It was amazing listening to the topics they came up with (Al Capone, Ronnie Biggs, and Tutankhamen). *This program didn't really give me much of an idea as to how to teach these individuals but it did give me great insight into what they might be like behaviour-wise and what they are capable of."*

- For the La Trobe students involved in the ALEP in 2005 and 2006, the ancient Chinese Confucian proverb seems to rings true.

I hear and I forget

I see and I remember

I do and I understand

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- www.latrobe.edu.au/giftedchildren



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**Thank you for
coming, for your
close attention,
and for your
dialogue with us.**

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