

Identifying Gifted and Talented Indigenous Students

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Project Title	Identifying Gifted and Talented Indigenous Students: Preliminary Visit to Groote Eylandt and Bikerton Island
Project Team	Dr Peter Merrotsy (SiMERR NSW)
Period	April 07
Funding Agency	SiMERR
Organisational Base	SiMERR NSW

Description

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Groote Island and Bikerton Island are certainly among the most isolated educational contexts in Australia. Three of the schools are community schools for three Indigenous language groups. This project combined the delivery of professional learning with speculative research.

Professional training and development in gifted education was delivered to teachers of Alyangula Area School, Angurugu Community Education Centre, Umbakumba School on Groote Eylandt, and Milyakburra School on Bikerton Island. Community workshops were also provided for parents in each of the four communities.

Research was conducted into the education of gifted and talented students and Indigenous conceptions of giftedness and appropriate educational responses. This involved observation of children in classroom activities, discussions with teachers, school executive teachers, and Aboriginal Education Assistants, and sighting of school documentation and teaching programs.

Dr Merrotsy spent a full day at each of the smaller community schools, and two days at the larger area school where he worked with teachers in the classroom, looking at various forms of curriculum differentiation. At three schools he spend some time with individual students to assess their cognitive potential and to suggest areas of curriculum development to meet their needs.

Each day after school and on two evenings, Dr Merrotsy led professional development workshops on gifted education for teachers and teachers' aides. Community meetings for parents also discussed the needs of gifted children.

Participants

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All teachers (20) in the four Groote Eylandt schools took part in after school professional development. Parents (15) in three of the communities attended afternoon and evening workshops.

Findings

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There were three main findings from this study:

- Contrary to 'received wisdom' on Aboriginal education, when trust is established Aboriginal children are very inquisitive and will ask questions, will look an adult in the eye, and enjoy individual autonomy when it is appropriately encouraged and supported;
- Teachers want to provide for all abilities in their classrooms, including giftedness, but are struggling to achieve this with the resources that they have. Clear areas in which a lack of resources are evident include: reading material, in English and in traditional languages; whole community education programmes; involvement of adult males in the school; appropriate school buildings; access to ICT, fast access to the internet, and appropriate ICT support; and, access to senior secondary schooling.
- Parents want their children to learn and to do well. Implicit understandings of giftedness recognise advanced development and do respond to it in a differential way, guided by a pedagogy of 'progress when ready'.

Outcomes

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Journal articles

- Ashman, A. & Merrotsy, P. (2009) Diversity and educational environments. In A. Ashman & J. Elkins (Eds.), Education for Inclusion and Diversity, 3rd edition, (pp. 57-89). Camberwell, Vic.: Pearson Education Australia.
- Clark, J. & Merrotsy, P. (under review: 2008) Gifted Aboriginal Students: Making the Pathway Accessible. Australian Journal of Indigenous Education.

Conference presentations

- Merrotsy, P. (2007) Gifted education in rural and isolated contexts: Recent Australian research. Colloquium, 17th Biennial World Conference for Gifted and Talented Children, University of Warwick, UK, 5-10 August.
- Merrotsy, P. (2007) Gifted education in rural and isolated contexts: Recent Australian research. Paper presented at the 54th Annual Convention, National Association for Gifted Children, Minneapolis, USA, 7-11 November.
- Merrotsy, P. (2008, March) Underachievement and disadvantage. Keynote address. From Ability to Achievement: From Potential to Performance, 17th State Conference, Queensland Association for Gifted and Talented Children, Brisbane.
- Merrotsy, P. (2008, May) Underachievement and disadvantage. Invited presentation. Potential into Performance: Celebrating Innovations, 3rd Annual Rural and Regional TalentEd Conference, UNE.

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