

Enrichment Days for Gifted Students

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Project Title	Enrichment Days for Middle School Rural and Regional Gifted Students
Project Team	Dr Susen Smith (SiMERR NSW), Ms Carol Davies, Mr Ray Smith, lecturers in Gifted Education, UNE Armidale Regional Enrichment Committee (UNE), Professor Ronald Laura (University of Newcastle), NSW DET Regional Reference Group of Consultants, teachers and parents, and Kelly Naylor (MAC1).
Period	November 07 – June 08
Funding Agency	SiMERR
Organisational Base	SiMERR NSW

Description

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This project was a collaboration between SiMERR NSW, UNE School of Education Gifted and Talented lecturers, TalentEd, regional and rural NSW DET, Independent and Catholic schools, parents and community volunteers. The project provided professional learning for middle school teachers to develop the skills and strategies needed to work with small groups of students on two enrichment days. One enrichment day incorporated creatively using ICTs and problem solving in Creative Animations. The other was the science based Amazing Brain Day. Teachers from each school identified and nominated gifted and talented Years 5 to 8 students, according to their area of interests, strengths, creativity, ICT skills, and passion for science. Two UNE Enrichment Days were held for students, teachers and associated parents. Discussion forums with parents identified areas of need for gifted and talented students. Participants completed evaluations of the enrichment days and the results will be used to inform the next enrichment days and provide feedback to teachers.

The first enrichment day in 2007 included professional learning for middle school teachers on developing grouping skills, using ICT software to create animations. Selected gifted and talented students from Grades 5 to 8 came to UNE to learn about animation and its different styles, including stop motion animation, traditional drawn animation and pixilation. The 60 students, some from remote schools e.g., Walgett, formed groups and applied what they had learned during the program to create their own short animated films using computer software, digital cameras, and their own props with some outstanding results. Students and teachers were given copies of their finished animations, all of which were placed on UNE's TalentEd website. Parents were given information to help maximize their child's opportunities in the area of creative animation and design and took part in a forum to discuss their children's needs in relation to gifted and talented education.

The second enrichment day in 2008 was "The Amazing Brain Day". By carefully dissecting lambs' brains, students gained some valuable insights into the function and essential maintenance of their own "grey matter". Students learnt to locate, identify, dissect and describe at least 10 parts of the brain. They modelled brains from playdough, discussed the function of the brain in learning, and the care of the brain through healthy patterns of eating, drinking, sleeping, studying, and recreation. Presented by the internationally renowned educational consultant John Joseph, the full-day workshop engaged students between the ages of 6 and 16 and helped them to understand the complex process of learning, and to increase their sense of control over their learning performance.

Participants

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UNE lecturers and teams, UNE students, Elizabeth Perry (MAC1 Professional Learning Facilitator), Dr John Joseph (Focus Education), 190 gifted and talented students from across eight regions of NSW and 31 schools, 80 teachers, and parents.

Findings

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A survey evaluation of the project was undertaken with presenters, students, teachers and parents. Teacher and parent forums were held on the first enrichment day. These provided opportunities for the participants to review the process, planning and implementation of the enrichment days to inform future events. The first enrichment day was very successful with the North West and New England regions and the UNE community throwing its support behind the project. School of Education lecturers from the ICT team and the Learning & Teaching team and UNE students supported the teachers and students. The two-day program allowed rural and regional students and teachers to be creative problem solvers in a collaborative context and to use a variety of computer software and other materials to support their creations in an enjoyable and authentic learning environment. ICT skills were developed and students from isolated communities had the opportunity to work with like-minded peers.

The evaluations of the second enrichment day are currently being collated. However, most participants highly agreed that the day was well organised and met their expectations and that they learnt enough to go away and share their skills with

others. Some comments included: Mr Joseph said that, "It's critical that students know how to look after their brains and how to be efficient learners." A teacher said that "We want more science-based, hands-on days like these", and students wanted to be involved in more days like these because they "really enjoyed the day, it was exciting and [they] learnt a lot". The results will enable comparisons between the two evaluations of the enrichment days and inform the planning of future enrichment programs. Advisors were very helpful and assisted in the planning and implementation of the events and provided suggestions for future planning. A further goal is to investigate options for future funding so the project becomes sustainable.

Outcomes

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Teachers were supported to develop skills during teacher professional learning days to work with small groups of gifted and talented students on enrichment days. Teachers developed science, problem-solving, creativity and ICT skills that can be utilised in their individual school contexts to support their teaching and the students' learning. The Science, creativity and ICT based enrichment days provided opportunities for students who otherwise would not access such programs due to distance and lack of associated programs. A plan for further enrichment days links more closely with in-school provisions and research and investigations continue regarding further options for funding.

Conference presentations

- Smith, S.R. (2008, March). Enrichment Programs in Action. Paper presented at the UNE TalentEd Conference, Armidale.
- Smith, S.R. (2008, July). An ecological framework for dynamically and inclusively differentiating the curriculum. Paper presented at the One Voice International Conference, The Institute of Elemental Ethics and Education, Westin St. Francis, San Francisco, USA.
- Smith, S.R. (draft, 2008). Enrichment Programs in Action: A dynamic model of enriching teaching and learning for gifted students. TalentEd and/or the Australasian Journal of Gifted Education

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A major benefit of these enrichment days at UNE was the opportunity for students to spend time with others who have similar interests. UNE is a leader in the field of gifted and talented education and the TalentEd Enrichment Program seeks to increase opportunities for gifted students (and their teachers and parents) from across many rural and regional areas of NSW and Queensland to access a variety of enrichment activities and/or professional learning in creativity, philosophy, mathematics, science, and ICTs. Such opportunities can be scarce in rural and regional areas. Our unique model provides dynamic communal learning opportunities for students, teachers and parents together. Participants are encouraged to return to their own educational context and share their new-found strategies and skills. In this way, a wider audience is reached than those who attend the days. This is particularly important for those in isolated regions.

Related documents

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