



Professional Learning
Research
Innovation

Learning in Practice

Volume 1 Number 1 November 2017



About the Barker Institute:

- Provides a centre for research, reflective practice, professional learning and innovation in education
- Is a resource hub that facilitates the ongoing development of learning for teachers, allowing them to stay abreast of emerging practice, constantly striving to refine the quality of teaching and learning
- Looks to develop collaborative ventures with other institutions and providers, initiating research and innovation combined with the implementation of new projects and programs for the benefit of students, staff and the broader community
- Shares current research and issues with parents, professional bodies and educators around the globe through ongoing symposia, forums, lectures and conferences

About the Learning in Practice Journal:

As a leader in Christian education, Barker College aims to both demonstrate and inform best practice. This journal was developed to showcase a range of initiatives and research projects from across the School. It explains the rationale behind innovations in practice and archives pivotal developments in Barker's academic, co-curricular and pastoral realms.

Editors

Dr Brad Merrick
Dr Greg Cunningham
Mrs Amanda Eastman

Editorial Assistant

Susan Layton

Creative

Glenn Quevedo

Printing

Barker Print Room

About the Author

Greg Longney is a teacher of History and the Head of Academic Enrichment and Extension. His Masters of Education (Research) focused on how History teachers understand disciplinary knowledge and how they communicate it to their students. In 2017 Greg has been part of the National Emerging Leaders Program and has conducted a project on the status and role of academic enrichment and extension at Barker College. Greg continues to teach History from Year 7 -12 and he still views the classroom experience as the most challenging and rewarding aspect of his role.

NELP: Clarifying and Changing Practice around Academic Enrichment and Extension



Learning in Practice
2017 Vol. 1 (1)
© Barker Institute 2017

Greg Longney

Head of Academic Enrichment and Extension

Abstract

This paper presents a series of reflections on the writer's experience as a participant in the National Emerging Leaders (NELP) Program run by the Association of Independent Schools (AISNSW). The change project being undertaken focuses on the curriculum area of academic enrichment and extension. The paper reflects on how distributed leadership and growth coaching, as features of the NELP program, have contributed to the change project.

The National Emerging Leaders Program (NELP) has given me the opportunity to undertake a change project in the important area of academic enrichment and extension. This has coincided with my appointment to oversee the development of this curriculum area from the start of 2017. The NELP program has supported the development of this change project by promoting an understanding of distributed leadership. Alma Harris (2014) describes distributed leadership as "mobilising leadership expertise at all levels in the school in order to in order to generate more opportunities for change". The process of clarifying and changing practice through this project has seen leadership distributed to many staff within the College. In Harris' terms, the change project has been an experience where leadership has been based on expertise rather than title alone.

Another significant feature of the NELP program has been an emphasis on peer coaching. The development of a coaching relationship with a staff member from the partner schools (Caulfield Grammar School and Barker College) has provided participants with regular opportunities to test out their thinking in relation to the direction of their project. Coaching conversations have worked to keep participants on track and to provide guidance, through questioning, to overcome the challenges of leading and managing change.

John Kotter (2017) advocates an eight-step process for leading change and I have adopted Kotter's model as a framework for my project. An important first step has been identifying what is meant by the terms enrichment and extension. Typically, the terms enrichment and extension are used interchangeably to refer to aspects of a curriculum that pertain to the most able students. At Barker College, we hope to deliver academic enrichment for all students, based on the belief that everyone deserves to have an enriched curriculum experience. By contrast, academic extension programs seek to serve the intellectual needs of our most able learners.

Kotter identifies the first step in a change project as creating a sense of urgency. In terms of looking at enrichment and extension in schools, this is no easy task. Academic extension is quickly associated with gifted and talented education and this usually brings forth a number

of preconceived ideas and myths (NAGC, 2009). Common views are that all students are gifted and that gifted programs are elitist. Whilst these views were not articulated to any great degree in preliminary investigations for this study, they do present as a barrier to creating a sense of urgency as they can lead to a position where curriculum change in the areas of academic extension and enrichment appears to be less of a priority than other curriculum areas. Barker College has a strong record of producing very good academic results and, by this narrow measure, it can appear that academic extension practices are well refined. Nevertheless, there has been a general level of agreement that, as a school, we need to do more to meet the needs of our most able learners.

Creating a sense of urgency has been assisted by the School's decision to move to full coeducation. As part of the preparation for this transition, a series of working groups met during Term 1, 2017 to discuss all aspects of school life. The working group focused on curriculum allowed me to speak with teachers from across the school and hear a wide range of views about current approaches to academic enrichment and extension. Over a series of meetings, a core group of staff with an interest in enrichment and extension formed and a coherent set of priorities emerged.

One of the small but significant decisions of this 'guiding coalition' was arriving at shared definitions of what enrichment and extension mean in a Barker College context. The group arrived at the following:

- Academic enrichment programs enhance the learning experiences of all students, regardless of ability level. Most academic enrichment is built into departmental programs and is accessed by all students in the normal delivery of the academic program. Other programs complement departmental programs and are accessed by all students. In addition, some programs are available to all but only access by a few.
- Academic extension programs are designed to extend the learning of some students, where those students have demonstrated a high level of intellectual ability. Extension programs recognise the specific learning needs of gifted and talented learners and modify programs to support these needs. Modifications may be required in the content, process, and product of learning.

Based on these definitions, the group identified the following priorities to improve the delivery of academic enrichment and extension programs across the school:

- Improve alignment between Junior School, Middle School, and Senior School Programs
- Initiate an agreed program of regular cognitive testing to ascertain and monitor intellectual potential.
- Review current streaming arrangements in the high school with a view to creating more genuine extension classes. The characteristics of these groups would be the same as Junior School Aspire groups (compacted curriculum, increased challenge, the scope for personal interest and inquiry).
- Investigate the use of inquiry units in the High School (7-10) as both a vehicle for enrichment and an accelerator for extension.
- Consider opportunities for academic acceleration relevant to the Barker context. Susan Assouline's (2017) work is important here.
- Initiate a program of staff professional to support the implementation of these initiatives.

Returning to Kotter's first step of creating a sense of urgency, the list above represents a clear set of priorities across the school. The ability to work with teachers from K-12 revealed that we need to do more to shape a coherent plan of enrichment and extension. Middle School programs need to build on Junior School programs and place greater emphasis on tracking students as they move from sub-school to sub-school. Furthermore, a great deal of discussion centred on the role of inquiry models of learning as vehicles for effective academic enrichment and extension.

As it prepares for IB PYP candidacy, the Barker College Junior School is well advanced in the implementation of guided-inquiry units with a focus on the IB Learner Profile. Our 'guiding coalition' hopes that units of inquiry, with a similar transdisciplinary focus, can be introduced and embedded in Years 7-10. This would contribute to the goal of having greater continuity between Junior, Middle and Senior School programs.

Guided-inquiry has the potential to support effective academic enrichment for all students and can also be an effective model for a consistent approach to academic extension. In terms of enrichment, well-structured inquiry units will create opportunities for students to deepen their learning by making connections across subjects. This will become a feature of Middle School programs from the start of 2018 with plans for collaborations between History and English (Year 7), Science, Geography and English (Year 8), Science and History (Year 9) and Mathematics and Commerce (Year 9).

Furthermore, inquiry approaches also serve the needs to students who require greater intellectual challenge. For students, who are likely to master content and concepts more quickly than their peers, teachers will find time for personal inquiry by compacting the curriculum. Curriculum Compacting (NAGC, 2017) is a technique for differentiating the curriculum that focuses on replacing content that students already know with new content. This new content is likely to be characterised by greater complexity, greater abstraction and more opportunities for students to pursue areas of personal interest. In these ways, a guided-inquiry model used selectively and purposefully, has the potential to be at the heart of the College's enrichment and extension program. This approach will be implemented in 2018 for extension classes as part of the review of ability grouping (streaming).

With a focus on distributed leadership, supported by peer coaching, NELP has brought this change project to the point where the author can confidently implement changes to enrichment and extension practice in a specific school context. The next instalment will focus on the remaining parts of the Kotter model: enabling, generating and sustaining change.

References

Assouline, S. (2017) Presentation at GAFE Forum, Newington College, Sydney. March 18, 2017

Harris, A. (2014) Distributed Leadership Retrieved from <https://www.teachermagazine.com.au/articles/distributed-leadership>

Kotter International (n.d) Retrieved from <https://www.kotterinternational.com/8-steps-process-for-leading-change/>

National Association for Gifted Children (n.d) Retrieved from <https://www.nagc.org/myths-about-gifted-students>

National Association for Gifted Children (n.d) Retrieved from <https://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/gifted-education-practices/curriculum-compacting>



 @barkerinstitute

 facebook.com/barkerinstitute

 www.barkerinstitute.com.au