

# An Adlerian in Australia

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Australia is an unusual land of unusual opportunities. I was fortunate enough to be able to spend five years “Down Under” as a lecturer (USA equivalent to Assistant Professor) with the Psychology Department at the University of Queensland (the largest university in Australia).

After returning from Australia six months ago, I have had an opportunity to reflect on implications that Australia holds for the Adlerian Movement. I would also like to share some of my personal experiences I had living in Australia. Perhaps what I learned may help those Adlerians who have considered working in Australia.

## Facts about Australia

When we decided to move to Australia, I, like many Americans, was very ignorant of Australia—geographically, climatically, politically, etc. Perhaps I was more ignorant than most. I thought Australia was a large island way down under in the South Pacific.

As we began to make final preparations for our trip, we researched what our new home was really like. Our first surprise was that Australia was approximately the same size as the USA—but with only as many people as the state of New York. Most of the people in Australia live in major cities on the east and west coast. We also discovered other similarities between the U.S. and Australia. Australia’s first non-native settlers also came from England. They settled the east coast first and then migrated to the west coast. All along the way, they encountered Aborigines which have lifestyles as close to the American Indian as you’ll find anywhere in the world. The climate and topography in Australia is also as varied as in the USA. For example, Brisbane, Queensland (where I lived on the north-east coast) had a climate and terrain similar to San Diego’s. Melbourne, on the south-east coast, has a rainy climate similar to Oregon’s.

## How We Moved to Australia

Australian universities advertise their positions in the major newspaper for Australia—*The Australian*. Current issues are available in most major

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libraries. The American Psychological Association's *Monitor* also usually has current listings of Australian academic positions in psychology. I responded to a newspaper advertisement. After several promising letters, I found myself being offered a position.

Once we decided to accept the position, our next task was to obtain American passports and Australian visas. Getting the passport was predictable and easy. Getting visas was time consuming, unpredictable, and frustrating. After about two months of nervous waiting, we had them and were off. On the positive side, the University of Queensland paid my family's air fare to Australia and about \$1000 of our removal expenses. Such financial assistance remains in effect today for Americans taking up positions in Australian universities.

Just before departure, my wife, Jane, two daughters—Daisy (age four) and Sonya (age two), and myself visited Mr. and Mrs. Maurice Bullard in Corvallis, Oregon. We had never met them before but heard that they might be helpful in starting up Adlerian Parent Education programs. The visit turned out to be an important factor in our attempt at introducing Australia to Adlerian parent education.

### **Our First Few Months in Australia**

When we arrived in Australia, we immediately went through the culture shock experience. Whenever my wife and I encountered something unexpected, we would find ourselves feeling like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* and reply Well—"This isn't Kansas." Actually, Australia is basically a cross between England and USA. The major part of our "shock" when we arrived in Australia was money and our lack of it. My salary was \$10,000 Australian which was supposed to be equivalent to \$15,000 USA at the bank. Actually, \$10,000 Australian in 1974 bought about what \$10,000 would buy in the USA in 1974—not very much. So we learned to survive with no car for the first year.

During the five years I was in Australia, my salary doubled due to cost of living increases and annual raises. Today, Australian university salaries are a bit better than USA university salaries. Homes in Australia are cheaper too. For example, we sold a beautiful 100 year-old Colonial house with high ceilings on about an acre with an olympic size pool surrounded by palm trees, tropical fruit trees and wild parrots for \$62,000 USA dollars. That house would cost \$250,000 here in Oregon. We were also in a nice neighborhood and only a ten minute drive from the university.

### **Counseling Psychology in Australia**

I was hired to develop a counseling psychology program within the Department of Psychology at the University of Queensland. Before my

arrival, the department only offered coursework and practical experiences in experimental and clinical psychology.

In the past, clinical psychology in Australia meant testing and no counseling or psychotherapy. More recently, clinical psychologists have begun to use behavior modification techniques to treat phobias, sexual dysfunctions, and enuresis.

Counseling psychology is a recent arrival on the Australian campus. The community and students have enthusiastically welcomed counseling psychology as an alternative to the more narrowly defined disciplines of experimental and clinical psychology. Counseling psychologists offer a broad range of services which include parent education, individual and group counseling and psychotherapy, and marriage, child and family counseling. The Adlerian frame of reference was very popular among the Australian students I trained to provide counseling related services.

### **Parent Education in Australia**

My involvement in parent education provides a good illustration of how Australia holds unusual and exciting opportunities for Adlerians. After our first six months in Australia, my wife, Jane, got a job as the director of a Family Day Care (FDC) Program. FDC is when parents take in other pre-school children during the day while the natural parents work. FDC parents are supervised weekly and are provided with equipment and support from the FDC director and staff. Jane's program was governmentally funded and operated on a one year renewable grant. When Jane started her program, there was some skepticism by the government officials and local child care workers about the FDC concept. They mentioned that a similar FDC program was tried a few years earlier in Perth, Australia and it didn't work. The program was terminated because the FDC parents tended to quit after working two or three months. FDC gained the reputation as being an unstable environment for preschool age children, since the children were moved from FDC home to home.

When Jane started her program, she decided to put her FDC parents through a parent education program based on *Children: The Challenge*. She believed that the program could help the "parents" better understand and work with "their children" and therefore want to continue with their jobs. Apparently the course helped. Out of the twenty FDC parents Jane started with, eighteen were still in the program at the end of the first year. The news of Jane's success quickly reached Canberra, the capital of Australia. After visiting her program to see what was making it work, they concluded it was the parent education component. The representatives from Canberra were delighted that FDC could work. They always had felt that a natural home environment was superior to the institutionalized climate found in pre-school child care

centers. Another dimension to their happiness related to the fact that FDC could save the Australian government millions of dollars. Now, they wouldn't have to spend money building more pre-school child care center facilities.

As I reflect back on our early work with parent education in Australia, I remember the generous and kind support of the Bullards and the Oregon Society of Individual Psychology. They were especially helpful in sending *Children: The Challenge* books and supplemental materials.

In 1976, Jane and I heard about the release of Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) by Dinkmeyer and McKay (1976). At that time, the only other parent education we knew of being offered in Australia was our *Children: The Challenge* courses in Queensland and a few people providing Parent Effectiveness Training in Sydney, Australia.

From 1976 to 1979, Jane and I conducted numerous weekend workshops for people interested in offering STEP programs to their communities. During this time, we trained professional helpers representing a cross section of disciplines (e.g., social workers, counselors, pre-school teachers, nurses, physicians, and psychologists). The majority of the participants were residents of Queensland. Soon, the word filtered around that STEP worked. When we left Australia in 1979, several thousand parents were attending STEP courses each year. Courses were being conducted in high schools, pre-schools, children service departments, etc.

I believe there are several reasons why STEP has been so widely accepted in Australia. Australians value logic and reason in their approach to life tasks. Logical and natural consequences are therefore attractive concepts for child rearing in Australia. They also believe in fair play and sportsmanship—or “good cricket.” The Adlerian-Dreikurserian concept of mutual respect is therefore also appreciated by the Australian people.

I believe that the main reasons Australians like STEP is the main attraction it holds for most people of the world. STEP helps parents understand and work with their children in simple-practical terms. For many, the STEP Program puts structure to common sense ideas that people already know and believe in. The structure provided by STEP allows the parent to build a frame of reference that they can *consistently* use with their children.

As I reflect on our Australian experiences with STEP, I often think of the many letters of support and guidance from Don Dinkmeyer and Gary McKay. Their effort and encouragement was greatly appreciated.

### **Americans Living in Australia**

Living in Australia provided my family many opportunities and adventures. We were able to introduce a parent education program in a land half way around the world.

Our research on parent education also allowed us to gain an unusually clear look at the effects of parent education (i.e., since parent education was new there were minimal extraneous variables obscuring the effects of our treatment and control groups—see Schultz, Nystul, & Law, 1980; and Schultz & Nystul, 1980).

Living in Australia was also a challenge. Quite simply, the distance from our old friends and family in the USA finally got to us. It was my observation that Americans clearly had the most trouble of all migrants adjusting to Australia on a long term basis. I believe the reason for this is simple. Every non-American migrant I knew (e.g., from India, England and Italy), either had some relative living in Australia or had one with serious plans of making the move. I didn't know any American who had either a relative living in Australia or one on the way. Eventually, we began to miss our brothers and sisters and moms and dads too much. It was time for the Nystuls to go home.

## Conclusion

While in Australia, numerous Adlerians contacted me about how to find work in Australia and what it was like living there.

In this paper, I provided you the views of one Adlerian in Australia. If you ever make the trip, I think you will agree that Australia is an unusual land of unusual opportunities.

## References

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*“For what I am today shame on my parents. But if I stay that way, shame on me.”*

—Jess Lair

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