



Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

What Works. The Work Program

Improving outcomes for Indigenous students

Successful practice

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Case studies and the *What Works* website

The case studies appear at various points on the site but can be accessed directly by going to www.whatworks.edu.au. New case studies are uploaded regularly. Register via 'What Works News' for notification.

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What Works. The Work Program. Improving outcomes for Indigenous students. Successful practice.
Geoff Ainsworth and David McRae

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Contents

Introduction	1
Very important points	2
General advice	4
Mainstream schools	4
Remote schools	6
From students	7
Some core documents	8
Cultural respect, recognition and support	10
Darlington Public School	10
Auntie Rachel Reflects	11
The Ganai Project	12
Forming partnerships	13
South Merredin Primary School	13
Talking it over, working together	14
Working systematically	16
Badu Island State School	16
Bonnyrigg High School	17
Cherbourg State School	18
Kormilda College	19
Pastoral support	21
A principal's view	21
Kormilda College	22
'Real justice' at Queanbeyan South Public School	23
Improving outcomes in literacy	24
The 'Deadly Ways to Learn' project	24
Deadly Writin', Readin' and Talkin'	26
Improving outcomes in numeracy	27
Maths in Context	28
The early years	30
Kempsey South Public School	30
The middle years	32
Karama Primary School	32
Merredin Senior High School	33
North Rockhampton State High School	33
VET activities in secondary schools	34
The senior years	35
The day the postie came	35
The Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project	36
Booroongen Djugun College	37

Introduction

Two of the things we have discovered during the last few years of disseminating the *What Works* materials are that the case study materials are popular and valuable, but on the other hand not everyone wants or knows how to access them from the web.

It was with these matters in mind that this publication has been prepared.

At the time of writing our website contains more than 50 case studies of successful practice in educating Indigenous students along with a considerable body of other material. One of the first issues we encountered in its preparation was the sheer volume of the contents of the website, enough to produce a book of several hundred pages if we transferred it to paper verbatim. Should we include, say, five or six case studies in full along with a small amount of additional core material, or should we try to provide something more like a sampler with a coverage of the major themes?

We have chosen the second option. One reason for this choice was to emphasise the fact that we have been fortunate enough to experience that there are very many people around the country, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, who are actively engaged in this endeavour, who are thinking hard about what might produce success, and who *are* succeeding in improving educational outcomes for Indigenous young people. Another is to recognise the range of issues that teachers, communities and schools are tackling, all of which have some impact and all of which are, in the end, inter-related.

Along with providing some advice about using the materials as a whole, we have made a number of comments about case studies in *The Guidebook*. Some of the main points should be re-iterated here.

Case studies are subject to the perspectives of the sources of information and those of their authors; they are about what is, or was, happening at a point in time. They may be influenced by aspirations rather than realities. They can't possibly provide a global picture of a situation with all the factors in place and visible. These case studies are snapshots of particular places at particular times and some of them are a few years old now. People mentioned may have moved on or programs changed and, in at least one case, the featured school does not exist as a separate entity any more. But we are confident that at the time of writing the case studies in these materials present important examples of strategies which have led to success for Indigenous students.

Finally, they are rarely anonymous. They are about real people in real places whose insights are often personal as well as professional. These people are acknowledged in the credits in *The Guidebook* — we thank them again here.

As noted above, there is much more material on the website and links which will take you further again. We have tried to increase the accessibility of the case studies by some re-modelling of the site and by consistently providing access addresses throughout this document.

We wish you every success. The contents of this book will demonstrate that you are not alone in your endeavours.

“Our people have the right to a good education. Our children need the skills, experiences and qualifications to be able to choose their futures. Our communities need young people coming through with the education and confidence to be effective leaders. We need young people who can be advocates for our people, able to take their place in Australian society and still keep their culture strong.”

— The Department of Education, Science and Training Indigenous Education Ambassadors, a group of well known Indigenous Australians.

Very important points

These are answers to some questions commonly asked by non-Indigenous Australian teachers.

Who are the Indigenous peoples of Australia?

The authors of *The Little Red, Yellow and Black (and Green and Blue and White) Book: A Short Guide to Indigenous Australia* have this to say:

“Aboriginal people are those whose traditional cultures and lands lie on the mainland and most of the islands, including Tasmania, Fraser Island, Palm Island, Mornington Island, Groote Eylandt, Bathurst and Melville Islands.

The Torres Strait Islands lie between the northern tip of Cape York in Queensland and the south-west coast of Papua New Guinea. The Torres Strait Islanders have many cultural similarities with the peoples of Papua New Guinea and the Pacific. ...

The term ‘Aboriginal’ has become one of the most disputed in the Australian language. The Commonwealth definition is social more than racial, in keeping with the change in Australian attitudes away from racialist thinking about other peoples. An Aboriginal person is defined as a person who is a descendent of an Indigenous inhabitant of Australia, identifies as an Aboriginal, and is recognised as Aboriginal by members of the community in which he or she lives. [The same three components are used for Torres Strait Islanders.]

This definition is preferred by the vast majority of our people over the racial definitions of the assimilationist era. ...

Sometimes non-Aboriginal people get confused by the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, [but] ... the lesson to be learned from this is that we should not stereotype people; that people are different, regardless of race.”¹

1 *The Little Red, Yellow and Black (and Green and Blue and White) Book: A short guide to Indigenous Australia*, 1994, prepared by Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies on behalf of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, pp. 2 & 3.

Who can identify as an Indigenous Australian person?

This question, and the way it is sometimes used, is a common source of difficulty. Choosing to identify is a personal issue which can sometimes be deeply challenging. It has NOTHING to do with skin colour.



The Australian Government defines an Indigenous person as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives. Thus there are three components to the definition: descent; self identification; and community acceptance.

Should you treat Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students as individuals or as part of a culturally-defined group?

The answer is — both.

The question is very similar to one often raised in education and training about particular groups of students, such as students with disabilities, students of both genders, and ethnic and cultural minority groups. Should they be part of the mainstream, or should they get special treatment and be treated differently, sometimes in settings which are their own preserve?

It is not an ‘either/or’ question, but the starting point must always be the individual.

To be ‘out of the mainstream’ is a punishing experience, especially for adolescents. Being encouraged and able to do things that other kids do, is most important. Yet, it is also important to acknowledge and support the background cultures and identity of students. But, as so often noted in the cases in these materials, be cautious in your assumptions.

Culture is a complicated notion. Even in the most remote areas, Australia's Indigenous peoples shop, listen to recorded music, watch television, drive cars and trucks, and manage complex communities. Therefore, materially speaking, few Australian Indigenous people are living an exclusively traditional lifestyle. However, whether or not resources are purchased at a shop or acquired by hunting and gathering, the principles and basic tenets of people's lives remain much the same.

While most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in towns and cities, often in ways which are indistinguishable from the rest of the population, they all have a cultural heritage. This heritage may be powerfully influential on a day-to-day basis. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may choose not to publicly identify, or to not make a big deal of it. That's their choice. But to acknowledge and support awareness of Indigenous cultures is, in our shared circumstances, both just and deeply enriching.

Is there a 'learning style' which is distinctive to Indigenous young people?

The first thing to say is that there is no gene, or set of genes, which define culturally- or racially-based 'learning styles'. Ways of learning are derived from ways of life and how adults and other people, including peers, in the immediate context 'teach'. These ways of learning develop through a complex interaction between life experiences, habits and formal instruction. Some cultural differences may occur in this regard but they cannot be assumed. Culture is shaped by a multitude of circumstances and influences.

Young children are active learners from birth. They learn through play and through interactions with others. They make sense of the world through their first-hand experiences and through interactions with members of their families and communities. Meanings and understandings are shaped every conscious minute of every day. It is within these personally-experienced social contexts that young children's understandings of their world develop and grow.

Some ways of learning are therefore well-embedded by the time young children come to school. Others can be taught. In fact it is one of the functions of formal education to teach ways of learning that otherwise would not be acquired.

Children learn best when the nature of their experience in home and community is recognised and built on in other settings. The diversity of family and cultural contexts means that children bring different experiences to new learning situations.

One generalisation to test is that Indigenous students may, like many other students, respond well to collaborative learning. The authors of *Aboriginal Ways of Learning*² suggest that, again like many other students, Indigenous students are likely to benefit from the identification and fostering of individual or group learning strengths.

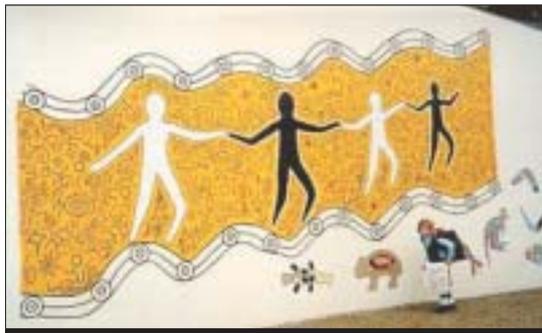
Ways of learning are also closely linked with perceptual functions — seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling and the kinaesthetic sense, awareness of your own body, its 'place in space' and its relation to other animate and inanimate objects. These are how we derive information about the world. If one or more of these functions are impaired or, for that matter, particularly acute, assumptions about what is conventional will not apply. Conventionally, learning at school or in training settings is heavily dependent on being able to see and hear well. The comparatively high incidence of hearing and other sensory impairment among some Indigenous children mean that these are matters for sensitive attention, with some potential modification of teaching practice and additional support for students required.

² Hughes, P., More, A. & Williams, M. 2004.

General advice

Mainstream schools

“The way it works for a great many teachers I deal with is that they first of all get up the courage to invite an Indigenous speaker into the school. This is in itself a bit of a challenge in that many teachers have never spoken to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person before, and have no idea how or who to approach one to ask them to talk to a group of students. The teacher suddenly realises that there is a whole group of articulate, experienced and successful, as well as appallingly treated (this usually comes out in the session with students) people that he or she knows very little about and with whom we share a country which was, not so long ago, theirs.



This is often such a powerfully engaging experience that they get the confidence to suggest that other colleagues might do the same thing, and then to start thinking about what else such a person could contribute to the school.

He or she is usually confronted, and disturbed, by the depths of their own ignorance. Most people decide to take steps to correct this. Teachers don't like being ignorant willfully. The teacher then tends to search for ways of meeting this need for their own knowledge by enrolling in PD sessions (if they are offered and the teacher knows about them, and the school will release them) and doing some reading.

Once the teacher's perspective changes, they also realise that they actually need to know more so that they can develop more appropriate curriculum responses, that the students need to know more about the facts, and the teacher needs to be teaching Indigenous perspectives and incorporating these into the curriculum. So curriculum change follows.

In making these changes, the teacher will come up against the reality that the school probably has few useful and appropriate resources. They often take on working for this area to be better resourced. He or she sets up a small group in the school which, over time, becomes formalised because there are so many sources telling us that this is what must be done. This group gains some influence with the school leadership which is generally willing to go along. And there you've got a change that usually matters.

This process can be triggered by the enrolment of one student. In terms of the process, it doesn't matter how many students you have, except that when there is a critical mass, i.e. from no students to something like four or five, then it is often given more attention by management and things move more quickly.

However, it is always, I think, at the single teacher level where change starts and, eventually, produces a real result.”

— A city-based Indigenous Education consultant

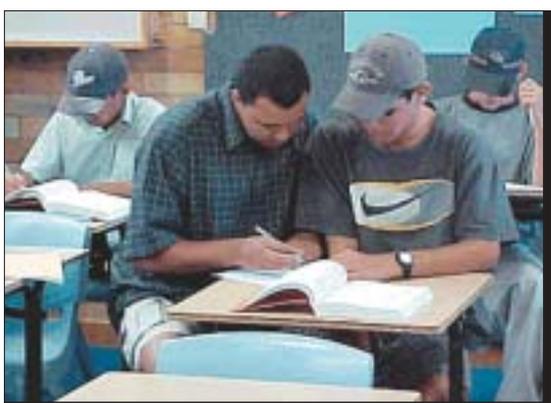
“What I try to do is get non-Indigenous teachers to go through the culture shock process. It doesn't matter what you're like as a person, if you go into an area where there is a different culture there is that culture shock. You've got to get them through it. It's not a quick process and some people take a year to work through it, or even a couple of years. And some take decades or never get there.

We have to adjust to the fact that Indigenous people are different. Sometimes the stereotypes come first: they're poor, their families are dysfunctional, that sort of thing. That becomes our armour. But eventually we realise, yes, there is a cultural difference.

Then you've got to work through the 'I'll save the world' syndrome. But in the end you've got to recognise Aboriginality. They're Aboriginal people! Once you get it, you can treat people as people, but never ever forget there are black cultures. So actually it's really simple, but it's a long process.

So I try to get teachers to get to know Aboriginal people as people rather than a social phenomenon. At one school, there was a big social golf competition every Wednesday afternoon and a lot of the Aboriginal parents used to play. Through golf, teachers were exposed to Aboriginal people as people, not as stereotypes. They realised that, hey, this is an Aboriginal man, he's not going to knock your money off or bludge your fags, he's a person. He's got a kid at school and he wants his kid to do well. And once you start to be able to relate as adults, person to person, you can develop better relationships with the kids as well. It's so important because otherwise you're scared of everything: scared of the Aboriginal elders and scared to do anything with the kids. And that makes you defensive and you can't do your job properly.

We have to extend every kid so in the end they can make their own choices. That's how you value people. That's how you treat and teach people as individuals.



Teachers are often worried about behaviour. So the systemic things you can do are things like structured lesson procedures, making sure that work is prepared, making sure the work is followed up. You can encourage kids to work in groups so the teacher doesn't have to be the 'dominant dog' who has to control everything. One of the easiest ways to develop conflict in the class is to be the dominant dog. With structured lessons you know you have definite points to get through and the kids are clear about it. So you can cater for the kids who like the big picture; and you can cater for the kids who can only handle a little bit at a time — but there is plenty of that feedback, reward and clarification. Just the classic stuff. And trying to get teachers to be less like control freaks.

Literacy and numeracy isn't just a school problem, it's a reconciliation problem. Until we have real reconciliation it will be very hard for Aboriginal kids to do as well as white kids in schools because the power difference will always be there. When everybody is treated as an equal by every system then everybody will have an equal chance. That's not philosophy. It's the real issue.

Above all, you've got to be sincere and honest. Don't pretend and don't be a fake. Kids are crap detectors from way back and Aboriginal kids are very, very experienced at being super special crap detectors. So you've got to work through that because you might think you're going to make yourself into a fantastic person, but kids will see right through you. Just be sincere and honest.

And don't castigate yourself or beat yourself around the head and shoulders. I've done that too, it's easy to do, but it makes no difference. To make a difference you've got to get in there and do the yards. And that's what Aboriginal communities want from you too.”

— A Principal of a school in a provincial town with large numbers of Indigenous students

Remote schools

“ Teaching in remote Aboriginal communities is a challenging occupation. There are frustrations, many of them concerning the physical conditions of the school or houses, frustrations in attempting to teach children from a different cultural background, frustrations when parents may seem totally uninterested in your work.

These communities are going through a period of social upheaval and transition. People are learning to take initiatives, to direct their own community and to determine their own futures. The value of a formal modified Western-style education is not seen by everyone. This means that sometimes teachers feel their work is not appreciated, even that their work is futile. The debate as to whether or not this is so rages endlessly.

If you come here, recognise these problems of seeming indifference, of poor attendance, but come with a positive attitude believing in the value of your work. There are enormous challenges if you are willing to accept them. It's hard work, it's difficult work and not everyone is cut out for it. If your main concern is for the amenities of city life and a city school, then don't come. The teaching is different but it is an experience you won't forget or regret.

You will find the children intelligent and dull, naughty and well-behaved, healthy and malnourished. You will also find that they are different — different in that their values, their beliefs, their language, their way of life, are all different from your own. Come prepared to learn about them and from them and, above all, accept them as legitimate.

Be prepared to examine what you do and why you do it. If you are to be effective you will need to carefully examine your own teaching technique, your basic aims, virtually all you do at school. You will need to be adaptable and flexible and prepared at all times to fend for yourself. You will need enthusiasm and a sense of humour to tide you over the bad stretches. You should think in terms of at least a two-year stay. Life as a teacher here is not a bed of roses, but if you are willing to work and learn you won't regret the time you spend here.”

— Excerpt from an induction document prepared by the Principal of an Arnhem Land school

- New teachers need to visit the parents and the community.
- New teachers need to be aware of the different culture of the students and be open to learning about that culture.
- Teachers should seek advice from community members about the places they can go in the community.
- If there are disciplinary problems the teachers should seek advice from the Aboriginal Teaching Assistant.
- New teachers should participate in the school bus run so that they can see first hand where the students come from.
- New teachers will need to be made aware of the names and words that are not used in the community so that they won't unwittingly cause offence.
- Teachers should not be reserved about speaking with and getting to know community members. If possible, they should go out together on weekends.
- Community members should be involved in the classroom.
- The teachers must teach English well as the students want to be able to get a job when they leave school.

— Advice for incoming teachers prepared by community members of a Kimberley school



Read the full text behind 'The Doors' at: www.whatworks.edu.au/3_1_2.htm

From students

Lanyon High School, a Year 7–10 school of about 800 students, is located in Conder, a southern suburb of Canberra. In many parts of Australia, Indigenous students are a small minority in our schools and so it is at Lanyon. There were 12 Aboriginal students at the school at the time of this forum.

What do your parents want you to get out of school?

Everyone agreed that their parents wanted them to get ‘a good education’. What is a good education? Answers ranged from ‘the chance to go to university’ to ‘finding what I’m good at and using it to get a job’. David said, ‘I came here because my mum had heard a lot of good things about how there was a program for Indigenous kids. I liked that idea too.’ Several others mentioned that their parents hoped they’d be able to learn about Aboriginal culture and history at school.



Nick Harris and students at Lanyon HS

What should schools do about Aboriginal culture and history?

Tanya said, ‘I still think we don’t learn enough about Aboriginal culture in class. We did a little bit about the Stolen Generation and that was good. But sometimes we were getting, sort of, a non-Aboriginal person’s ideas about Aboriginal people. When you’re sitting in the class it doesn’t seem right.’ Alan agreed. ‘We need to learn more about culture... heaps more about Aboriginal culture.’ Others agreed that although they had visits from Aboriginal people from time to time, more of an Aboriginal presence in the school would be good.

Kellie said that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students should be learning about Aboriginal culture and history ‘because it’s such an important part of Australia’.

Several students spoke of the diversity of Indigenous cultures and the need for non-Indigenous people to understand that. Alan said, ‘People think it’s all the same but it’s not. I’ve got a mate from up in Queensland and his people do things differently... the culture is different.’ It was agreed that non-Indigenous people shouldn’t generalise about Indigenous people.

As far as teachers are concerned, Tanya said, ‘I like it when they see that we’ve got a culture and we pride ourselves on that. I don’t think it has to be a big issue but Aboriginality is there all the time. People should know that.’

What can teachers do that helps you get on with your work?

All the students thought that they get on better with teachers who acknowledge and show some respect for Aboriginal culture.

Chris felt that it was best ‘when you can go and talk to teachers, ... you feel they’ve got time for you.’ Others mentioned teachers who ‘make you feel comfortable’. Alan likes teachers he feels ‘are real’. He also likes ‘someone you can respect, but not just because they’re a teacher, but because of what they know and how they treat you. You need to respect each other to a certain extent.’

But there was disagreement about how much teachers should ‘push’ you. Carla felt that pushing sometimes makes her stubborn ‘if it’s not done in the right way’. But Alan said, ‘I reckon I need someone to push me. Otherwise I’d cruise along.’ He also values teachers with a good sense of humour.

What should be the balance between individual and group work? There were several views. Carla said, ‘We work better in a group. Then we can work it out together. But when we’re by ourselves, we get frustrated. Sometimes we talk too much in groups and the teachers don’t like that.’ But others, such as David, stressed the importance of learning to work on your own.

What do you think about discipline systems in schools?

Although everyone agreed that schools had to have some sort of discipline system, there was no agreement about what such systems should look like. Some felt that detention was appropriate but others agreed with Alan that ‘sitting in detention looking at a book made me want to read less, not more!’

Alan’s remark led to Tanya’s comment that she didn’t like punishment by itself, but that any system ought to be aimed at encouraging the student to do better in future.

Several people agreed with Alan that ‘it’s a big shame to have the school ringing my dad and mum about me.’ But did that help students improve? Most thought so.

Carla told this story. ‘I was on a checklist system because I wasn’t doing my work. All the teachers had to fill in something about me. I didn’t like it at all but it did get me going again. Ringing up my Mum worked too! She looked at the checklist and knew what homework I had and then I did it.’

Alan had the last word: ‘If I was a teacher I think I’d get satisfaction out of working out how to make these kids not naughty, if they’re the right words.’

Read more about the student forum at: www.whatworks.edu.au/3_0_1_1.htm

Some core documents

Landmark reports

- Johnston, E. et al. (1991) *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody — National Report: Overview and recommendations*, Canberra, AGPS.

This is the summary version of the full report containing, as its name suggests, an overview of findings and related discussion and the full set of recommendations. The short section on ‘History’ alone makes this volume worth reading.

- Wilson, R. et al. (1997) *Bringing Them Home: National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families*, Sydney, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission/

Tragic and often harrowing reading about the history of Indigenous Australians, it nonetheless fills in important gaps in the knowledge non-Indigenous teachers should have.

Relevant Australian Government reports

- *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training 2006* (2008) Canberra, Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Available at www.dest.gov.au/sectors/indigenous_education/publications_resources/
- Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (2007) *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2007*, Canberra, author. Available at www.pc.gov.au/gsp/

Some key references

- Bourke, C., Rigby, K. & Burden, J. (2000) *Better Practice in School Attendance: Improving the school attendance of Indigenous students*, Canberra, DEST.

This report combines the results of a literature review, school data analysis and consultations with students, teachers and parents, to provide a picture of school attendance problems among Indigenous school students and effective strategies.

- Groome, H. & Hamilton, A. (1995) *Meeting the Educational Needs of Aboriginal Adolescents*, Commissioned Report No. 35, National Board of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra, AGPS.

This report is clear, comprehensive and, despite its age, still highly relevant. It has been widely circulated but is now out of print. Copies will be available from many libraries. It is of sufficient value to chase up.

- Hughes, P., More, A. & Williams, M. (2004) *Aboriginal Ways of Learning*. Available through What Works via the website queries service or calling (03) 9419 9622.

‘The Aboriginal Ways of Learning Project grew out of the search for best practice in teaching for Aboriginal students. Teachers, students and the research suggested that there were patterns in the strengths that Aboriginal students showed in the ways in which they learned. At the same time it was clear that there was not just one set of strengths.’

For additional general references go to: www.whatworks.edu.au/3_1_4_2.htm

Cultural respect, recognition and support

Cultural respect, recognition and support are a central strategy in improving outcomes for Indigenous students. ‘The Checklist’ (which can be found in *The Workbook*, p. 7) has three organising questions that schools can use to think about their progress:

- Are provisions in place for non-Indigenous staff to learn about Indigenous cultures in general and local Indigenous cultures in particular?
- Is there a recognisable Indigenous ‘presence’ in the school in terms of teaching and employed support staff, guests to the school and other support personnel?
- Does the school recognise and express its respect for the cultures of its Indigenous students in ways that are acceptable to and appreciated by students and other members of local communities?



Left: Former Principal of Immanuel College (Adelaide) Dr Neville Highett, standing near the entrance to the school, next to a sign recognising that it stands on Kaurna land.



Right: The Koori Classroom at Narrabundah Primary School, ACT.

See the Checklist at: www.whatworks.edu.au/3_1_3_3.htm

Darlington Public School (NSW)

At Darlington Public School, located near Redfern in inner Sydney, only about a quarter of the children who attend are Aboriginal, but as Principal Colleen Hayward commented:

“The school drips red, black and yellow. ... We say we are socially committed to Aboriginal studies and we are. We try to get Aboriginal perspectives into everything.

You have to keep working at it. If I took down the visual symbols of Aboriginality we could go back tomorrow to what we were. Not many people realise that. We have a very high level of commitment, but we have to demonstrate and show that commitment. Signs of it must be immediately visible.

We do it to recognise the children and where they’ve come from. We also do it to make sure that the parents who come in have very positive feelings about the school, and so that they will bring their friends and relatives along to look at the school.

We’ve got a picture up on the wall of a famous Aboriginal boxer. And the man himself came to deliver something. He was here, and absolutely delighted. For the first time ever he had been recognised. And he came back a couple of hours later with one of his friends to have a look at his photograph on the wall.

We feel that that is very important, especially so that we can become part of the local community.”



Read more about Darlington PS at: www.whatworks.edu.au/3_2_4_2.htm



Auntie Rachel reflects (TAS)

The Tasmanian Education Department published *As I Remember* for students in Years 5–8. It is a collection of audio recordings of interviews with eleven Tasmanian Aboriginal people, capturing their lived experiences, in order to support improved literacy among Aboriginal students.

Rachel Quillerat, a recent chair of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Association, contributed her story to the oral histories contained in *As I Remember*. Here are some extracts from an interview with her.

“I went to school on Cape Barren Island and the school in those days ... the education was very poor. It wasn't the teachers' fault, because we only had writing, arithmetic, geometry, history, no grammar. So when I left school in Grade 5 I couldn't spell, I could read, but only just. I was married at sixteen and then I started having my children. So I never had time to further my education. I done it on my own.

At night when I got the children off to bed or the baby asleep, I would sit up with an 'Examiner' and try to do the crossword. I would probably get three out and one I always remember was 'half man, half beast'. It was 'centaur' and I've never forgotten that. I went back to school for a while after I moved. Then I had my children and they went to school on Flinders Island, and that was a much better school.

But I couldn't help them with their homework because I had no education. I could sit down and read with them but there were a lot of things that I would like to have done more of and I couldn't.

When I moved to Launceston they went to Riverside High and they would have parent groups and that there. I would not go down there and sit down and mix with them because I thought I wasn't good enough. I thought they would put me down straight away. I was too scared. I knew I never had the education and I was frightened of making a fool of myself.

Then one of my sisters, she went back to the university where they had a place there for Aboriginal people that were past going to school — they could go back. And I finished up going there, for about two years I think it was, or twelve months. So I finished up with my sister in class **and** my daughter. And I was so pleased that I was able to say, look there's other ways now that you can be educated. You've long finished school, go out and get some education that will carry you on.

And I remember my sister sitting there one day and they showed a video, an Aboriginal video, what happened to the Aboriginals many years ago and she cried. She didn't even know those things had happened. It was all an education to me, to my daughter and to my sister.

So I would say now, the thing that I would stress to children, and I don't care whether they are Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, for heaven's sake the education is there, use it! Don't walk away from school like I did, not knowing anything. Because the education wasn't around then, so I had a good excuse. But today they can go through school, they can get the education and that's what you have to have today to survive.”

Read more about Auntie Rachel and *As I Remember* at:
www.whatworks.edu.au/3_2_4_3.htm

The Ganai Project (VIC)

The Ganai Project is based around the Woolum Bellum KODE school, in the Latrobe Valley district of Victoria. Many of its Koorie families have been in the area for many years, after being resettled from a number of missions, such as that at Lake Tyers.

Ganai is a traditional Koorie language of the area and the project involved the development of a CD-ROM to assist in revitalising the language.



Doris Paton (left) and Lynne Dent.

Doris Paton was the manager of the Ganai Project and is now Program Coordinator of the Koorie Unit at the Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE. Lynne Dent was the first Ganai LOTE teacher at Woolum Bellum and is now Koorie Education Field Officer, assisting other schools to introduce Ganai language into the curriculum.

Doris and Lynne talked about the Ganai Project:

“Doris: When the school started in 1995 there was an opportunity for the community to put the local language into the school. They thought it was appropriate for the kids in the area to learn their own language but at that time there were no materials. Absolutely no resources, no materials. Lynne was the only person in our community who had language experience so she was asked to teach the language at school and she went out and asked Elders if it was okay for her to do that, and they said yes. There was an Elders reference group and it was really their vision for the language to be revived in the community.

“Lynne: There was absolutely nothing that I could go and draw on, like work books or resources or anything. I taught preps to Year 10 and initially it was all in one day, so it was quite hard. But then I settled into it and I started to think of things to do that made the language alive so that the kids were using it every day. Some people believed that it was better to teach language to adults, and adults would pass it on to their kids, but I saw it coming from the other end, that if we taught the kids, they would be happy to use it and not scared about it.

“Doris: In the community at the time we didn't have many people who knew a lot of language. Elders used words when they spoke to each other and in our family both my parents speak some of the language and that was quite common. And then the IESIP SRP came along and we were able to develop the CD-ROM. It was a huge opportunity but it took a while for the multi media people to grasp what we wanted.

“Lynne: We didn't want a lot of text. I said we don't actually teach like that. If we were going to teach something, we'd go to the site and we'd talk about things there. We'd touch things and make it real and that's how we wanted the CD, with a lot of visual and oral stuff. All of the ideas and the games that we play in class are on the CD, so it's reinforcing what we do in class all the time.

“Doris: Because of the history of the families of the area, being moved off the missions and being dislocated from culture and knowledge, the kids have found through the school and through the language program a way of reconnecting. The language has been an important part of that. Then they go out and learn about things in their country, and they're really quite proud of the fact that they do have language and that they can use it and they do know a bit about their country. I think that's really important for their own personal self esteem and identity.

I guess we realise that the kids can't and won't live the way we used to live. We're just so far removed from it now. We're urban people, but that connection to land and to identify and to culture... it really, really means a lot. For our survival even. We have a lot of things happening in the community that aren't very good, but that connection will give kids a lot of benefits as they get older.”

Read more details about the Ganai Project at: www.whatworks.edu.au/3_2_4_7.htm

Forming partnerships

It is evident that good relationships between Indigenous people, both as individuals and as members of their communities, and non-Indigenous school personnel are one of the foundations of improving educational outcomes for Indigenous young people. Both *The Guidebook* and *The Workbook* in the *What Works* materials comment on this issue extensively and suggest a range of strategies and procedures which have been successful. Here are some stories of these strategies as lived experience.

South Merredin Primary School (WA)



Principal, Kym Allsop (left), with Aboriginal Liaison Officer Tanya Garlett.

Merredin is a regional centre on the Great Eastern Highway, about 300 kilometres east of Perth and about half way between Perth and Kalgoorlie. It is central to the Western Australian wheatbelt but has a population of fewer than 3000, a number that has fallen in recent years due to drought and the loss of a number of government agencies from the town. South Merredin Primary School has 180 students from Kindergarten to Year 7 and about 15% are Aboriginal.

Kym Allsop was speaking in 2004 when she was Principal of South Merredin Primary School. She is originally from the wheatbelt herself and has worked at a variety of schools in that area and elsewhere. Some years ago she worked at South Hedland Primary School, which had an 80–85% Aboriginal student population.

“When I arrived here four years ago there were a number of big issues at the school. Student behaviour management was one, and it involved Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal kids. There was gang behaviour, vandalism, bullying and some assaults on staff. Suspension rates and lunchtime detention rates were very high. Staff morale was certainly very low.

We had kids who weren't actually engaged in the educational program, and I think that was linked very much to the environment that existed within the school. There are plenty of social issues in the community but it's important to point out that while it's true that there are Aboriginal families with great needs it's also true that there are strong Aboriginal leaders as well. Some of them have now become mentors and role models.

But we just didn't have good interactions with our Aboriginal parents at that time and they didn't feel welcome at the school. We weren't using Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum and we weren't looking at cultural awareness for staff. Teachers' awareness of strategies for dealing with the cultural needs of our kids was also very low.

My passion for Aboriginal education really started up there [Hedland]. There were many issues confronting the communities in terms of attendance, retention, literacy and numeracy. But there's always the issue of the awareness of non-Aboriginal teachers and their ability to connect effectively with their kids. We just come from such different backgrounds.

I suppose traditionally we've gone in and thought that we could teach in a particular way, but once you get to meet and build real relationships with the community people, you find that that is what is integral to success. They're prepared to do what they have to to achieve success but relationships are always at the heart of it. There's enormous knowledge in the Aboriginal communities and they have so much to offer the rest of us.

It was about little steps to start with. The first thing that jumped out for me was to look at whether the school's behaviour management was inclusive of the different people that we have within our school community. It really wasn't.

At the same time I developed a good relationship with Tanya Garlett, the Aboriginal Liaison Officer who's part of the District Office. We talked about our beliefs and about how we were both committed to Indigenous kids achieving positive outcomes from school. So we often went on home visits together. And it wasn't about just doing home visits about the bad things. It was really important to be able to go and let someone know that their child has been at school on time every day.

It was at that time that I was trying to find a local Indigenous person who we could have as a mentor working in our school. I wanted the students to have someone they could they relate to, but I also knew it was an active way of working out the discipline issues. In the Kimberley I had seen the respect Aboriginal kids can have for a senior Aboriginal person.

When Aubrey started in 2002 we sat down and talked about our visions for what the school could be and we had a lot in common. He's a person who's very concerned about the directions of the community and his father is an Elder. Aubrey has huge community responsibilities and he works with the other schools as well.

We agreed on two focus areas at the start. One was about the Indigenous kids having a mentor that they could connect to. The second was working with me to establish positive perceptions and relationships between staff and the Indigenous kids.

Aubrey was able to help staff look at how we could take our knowledge from the cultural awareness training and use it in our teaching and learning programs. In the first year he put a lot of effort into getting local Aboriginal people to come in and share their stories, experience and knowledge with students and staff.

These days, he delivers Aboriginal Studies in collaboration with classroom teachers and has also been responsible for introducing Noongar language into the curriculum. And finally, Aubrey's role in promoting and supporting the involvement of Aboriginal parents in the school has been vital. From a situation where there was really no functioning ASSPA Committee, we have come so far that we recently won a state award."



Aboriginal mentor, Aubrey Nelson

Read more about South Merredin PS at: www.whatworks.edu.au /3_2a_1.htm

Talking it over, working together (WA)

This conversation between Glenys Collard and Rosemary Cahill took place in 2002. At the time, Glenys and Rosemary were 'Deadly Ways to Learn' project officers. Both work for the Education Department of Western Australia. Rosemary is a *wadjela*, a non-Indigenous Australian, Glenys is a *Nyungar* person from Kondinin, near Wave Rock in the south-west of Western Australia.

The full text of the conversation deals with a range of issues relating to Aboriginal English and bi-dialectal education as well as the education of young Indigenous people as well. These extracts are more about partnerships and working together.



Glenys Collard (left) and Rosemary Cahill.

“**Rosemary:** We started looking for what could be done to help literacy. But as I got to know Glenys and the other Aboriginal participants it became clear that it wasn't those day-to-day practices and literacy teaching strategies. That wasn't the key issue. The key issue was the teachers really getting to know their kids, knowing where they were coming from, valuing their culture and actually seeing that they did bring a whole lot of really valuable stuff to school, that hadn't been widely recognised and wasn't valued. And the reason it wasn't being valued is because it simply wasn't understood.

- “**Glenys:** That would be my word, the strongest word — understanding. Because a lot of people, you know, have said they’re this and that, they specialise in this area, and they’ve worked with Aboriginal people, and they’ve read materials and so on. But from a non-Aboriginal perspective. That’s okay for background, because I’ve read that stuff when I did a degree too. But there’s reading... and there’s reality. The reality I found was that nobody was touching on the right now, where our kids were and where we were as Aboriginal people.
- “**Rosemary:** There is always this cultural interpretation that’s happening. Glenys’s point about the non-Aboriginal people finding out about Aboriginal culture through books and so claiming to know about Aboriginality and Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal people as a group — yet very few can say that they know an Aboriginal person, and without that they don’t know much at all.
- “**Glenys:** I understand them [*wadjela* project workers] a bit better because I’ve worked really close with them and I’ve known them five or six years now. But most of my people aren’t doing that, and this is a part of that thing what Rosemary said. Do we know what *wadjelas* do? I know the ones that I work with. Otherwise I know hardly anyone, and it goes both ways.
- “**Rosemary:** Teachers are sort of buried by books that have strategies they can use. Here in Western Australia we have some fabulous resources that you can drag out. But at the end of the day, it wasn’t so much the strategy, what teachers did, that made the difference, it was what they believed. And the way to change what *wadjela* people believed was get them to engage in conversations with Aboriginal people and get the AEOs [Aboriginal Education Officers] to engage in conversations with the teachers, get those cross-cultural conversations happening and, and that is actually what changed where people were.
- “**Glenys:** ...the Aboriginal people actually being able to say what they wanted to say without feeling put down or that they hadn’t said it good enough, they started feeling better about. They’ve been in their communities and schools, working there for years, and they’ve seen teachers come and go. But they’re still on their first block. And, you know, the teachers come in and they have these plans, and they have all this set, and they know about everything. But the person who knows all about those kids, especially the Aboriginal kids, but they also know a lot of *wadjela* kids in these different towns, is that Aboriginal person sitting there so quietly.
- “**Rosemary:** It also needs to be said that, and Glenys and I often, often say it — we’ve operated in this two-way fashion, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal together kind of thing, and we talk about two-way teams, and it kind of gives the impression that it’s easy. And it’s absolutely not. It’s actually really hard because the sort of stuff that we’re dealing with goes to the core of who you are and the assumptions that you’ve grown up with...
- “**Glenys:** And if you didn’t have an argument, or disagreement, something would be definitely wrong.

Read the full text of the conversation at: www.whatworks.edu.au/3_1.htm
(You can also download it as a pdf file.)

Working systematically

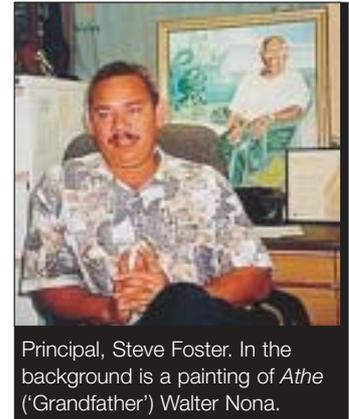
Improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students is not a short-term project. It is something that must be sustained over time. *What Works. The Work Program* suggests a systematic approach and *The Workbook* details a series of steps to be taken.

Read more about this in *The Workbook* or at: www.whatworks.edu.au/3_3.htm

Badu Island State School (QLD)

Badu Island State School is located in the Torres Strait, about 45 kilometres north of Thursday Island. The island has a population of about 1200 people and Standard Australian English is the third language for most students.

Until 2000, all students had to leave the community after Year 7 if they were going to continue to secondary school. At the time, Principal Steve Foster and community Elder *Athe* ('Grandfather') Walter Nona arranged for a process of community consultation that revealed a concern about secondary-aged students who were remaining in the community and not undertaking any formal secondary education program. In 1999, their numbers seemed to be increasing right across the Torres Strait and many were getting into trouble or considered to be 'at risk'. Some had been to secondary schools on the mainland for some time but had not lasted a whole year.



Principal, Steve Foster. In the background is a painting of *Athe* ('Grandfather') Walter Nona.

After further community consultation, and negotiation with Education Queensland and the Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee, a trial Year 8 Transition Program was established for 20 students.

At the end of 2000, a review of the program was facilitated by the District Director and included interviews with students, parents and school staff. Some of the findings:

- The average daily attendance was 98%. This was deemed extremely successful, considering that the students had previously not been attending school at all and many were 'at risk'.
- Students who had been identified as having low self-esteem had improved markedly in this respect.
- Students were saying they felt ready to go on to Year 9 at high school.
- Students felt more confident with literacy and numeracy. From a generally low base, their levels of literacy and numeracy were improving steadily if not dramatically.
- By August 2001, 17 of the 20 students were attending secondary schools and living away from home.

Read more about the work at Badu at: www.whatworks.edu.au/3_3_10.htm

Bonnyrigg High School (NSW)

Bonnyrigg High School is located north of Liverpool in the western suburbs of Sydney. It has about 800 students and 21 who identify as Aboriginal.

In April 2003, a professional development day was held for staff. The agenda included:

- An introduction to *What Works. The Work Program*
- The role of the district office
- What the data tell us about educational outcomes for Indigenous students
- The local community: history, organisations and services, protocols
- Developing strategies for Bonnyrigg HS: goals and targets
- Developing strategies in faculty groups.

Subsequently, an Indigenous Education Focus Team was set up, with representation including executive staff, classroom teachers and the Aboriginal Education Worker.

Following the first meeting of the Indigenous Focus Team, it became clear that a stock take of existing initiatives in Indigenous education was necessary. There are several ways this could be done, but the school had already looked at the idea of a 'spidergram' [from *The Workbook*] on the professional development day and it seemed a suitable tool.

The Team worked with Jo-Anne Fahey (Consultant Aboriginal Education based at Liverpool), using the spidergram to map out the things that were happening in Indigenous education in the school, and to identify any gaps.

A crucial step, however, was to turn around the spidergram process, and focus on individual Aboriginal students in the school. It is one thing to identify programs being offered, but it is quite another to identify the students being touched by those programs (and the students not being touched). In a school such as Bonnyrigg, with a relatively small number of Indigenous students, it is quite feasible to match individuals with programs.

Jo-Anne had this to say about the process:

“There was more on the spidergram in the end than we might have expected and some of the parents were really blown away by how many things were on the page. And as a spin off, that led to some of the parents themselves being added as resource people.

What needs to happen is that everyone in the school hears about the good things that are going on and starts to share in them. When people are sharing in the good things they'll want to come on board as well.

When you start with the spidergram you can see what the whole school is doing, and when you go to the faculty level you can identify how the faculty is doing.

But what about the kids? So we went back to the whole school spidergram and we tried to write down which kids are doing what under each part of the spidergram. Two or three kids seem to be in everything. But then there are other kids who aren't accessing anything like as much. So we can start to look at gaps and opportunities, and we can start to work out which programs particular kids can be encouraged to get involved in. It's all about gaps and opportunities.”



Jo-Anne Fahey.

Read more about Bonnyrigg at: www.whatworks.edu.au/3_3_2_1.htm

Cherbourg State School (QLD)

The work of Chris Sarra and others at Cherbourg has become well known over the past few years and Chris was Queenslander of the Year in 2004. His approach to improvement in an under-achieving Aboriginal school was considered and systematic.

Chris was speaking in June 2003:

“When I came here in 1998 (as principal), there were dramatic levels of underachievement. So we had to confront ourselves. And it was like there were two status quos in operation. There was a status quo in the school that was saying, well, we might be one of the worst performing schools in the state, but we can always blame the community for that, or the context of the children for that.

The other status quo involved the kids. They've been tricked into thinking that being Aboriginal means being on the bottom, like a lot of white people still might think that our people fit in right down there. That trick means that the kids don't aspire to achieve. We're trying to break that and 'un-trick' them, so they can have a truer sense of what being Aboriginal is. So when I say 'I want to use more Aboriginal approaches' in the school I'm talking about pride, identity and achievement.

I'd known for ever that Aboriginal parents want children to be able to mix it with anybody in any other school and eventually access society in the same way that any other Queenslander would, or any other human being would. But not at the expense of cultural identity. In the first couple of months, it was a matter of just checking that against perceptions in the community. Hence the school wanting to be 'Strong and Smart'. We want to be smart enough to mix it, but we also want to be strong and proud to be Aboriginal. That's the vision.

It's not easy. You've got to keep the connections with the community, build on them and set up those links between teachers and the community. But there's always help around... sometimes it's an IEW, sometimes it's a community member, sometimes an Elder. There's someone who can help you when you're a new principal, coming from outside, to broker links with the community. When I came to Cherbourg I had Mrs Long, who was already working with the school, but wasn't really valued as she should have been. She already had the vision! I learned a lot just observing the way she interacted with the staff and people around the community, I knew that she was somebody I had to work with. You have to have these people working alongside you.

And that's even more important for non-Indigenous principals. It irritates me when people say 'we need more Indigenous principals, like Chris'. That's flattering, but it's dangerous ground. Yes, we do need more Indigenous teachers and principals, but at the same time not having them can't be an excuse for not taking action, or saying 'we can't do much because we haven't got an Indigenous principal'. All it takes to make a start is good will.

I insist on not using separate or watered down measuring sticks for our kids. When the time is right, they'll be measured against other schools and other kids in Queensland. I insist on that because the parents don't want to know some sort of fluffy outcomes... they want the real deal. They want to know whether their kids can make it in Grade 8, and is he or she going to survive. And that's it, really. But again, the subclause is that it's not at the expense of their cultural identity. We're not out to make them like non-Aboriginal kids, we're just focusing on academic outcomes. We want to both things simultaneously, which I think we can do and we are doing.”



Read more about Cherbourg at: www.whatworks.edu.au/3_3_14.htm



Kormilda College (NT)

Kormilda College is a low-fee independent secondary Christian College. An educational priority of the College is to support Indigenous students to access and then be successful in secondary education. Of about 800 student enrolments, about 240 are Indigenous students who live in the College's boarding houses during school terms. These students come from approximately 40 different communities across the Northern Territory and represent approximately 11 distinct language groups. Many students have a strong Indigenous identity and speak more than one language as well as English. For many, English is a second language.

Julianne Willis is Deputy Principal of the College. Here are some extracts from her description of the process that took place at the school.

“It is a story about the developing understandings and practices of a school in relation to Indigenous education within Australia today. I am not Indigenous and I do not claim to have any answers. Ours is a story of struggle and some achievements.

When I arrived at the College ten years ago, we used a model for Indigenous education in which we implemented specialist programs and employed specialist staff with specialist knowledge.

Everyone employed in the College was committed and working very hard to achieve improved educational outcomes for our students. I think it would be true to say that our intentions had enormous integrity and that we were working very hard but that we were going in different directions. We did not have a shared understanding about who we were and what we were trying to achieve. I don't believe we fully understood who our students were. We did not have the range of skills or understandings necessary to effectively engage with the issues or develop the kinds of strategies necessary to move forward.

Many of our students would leave before making any real progress. Teachers had difficulty in engaging students in learning processes. We had difficulty in communicating with our parents. Much of the time spent in classrooms was devoted to counselling or crowd control. We were not alone in this regard.”

The process adopted was a copybook version of school change procedures.

The first step was to **explore and define the positive aspects of the school**: what have got going for us? Among the matters identified through this process were the following.

- The College's history. Many of our parents were once our students. Kormilda College is part of some communities' heritage and therefore parental support is strong. Being located in Darwin and being reasonably well known means that we are able to access a wide range of support and opportunities not available in small remote communities.
- A large number of Indigenous students. There is an Indigenous presence at Kormilda College that cannot be marginalised or ignored; and there are many pathways and opportunities that are available to our students due to the size of our operation and the number of Indigenous students in one place. Because of this, the College is often used as a site for health education programs. Well-known Indigenous people visit us and others come to us to offer assistance.
- Indigenous students at Kormilda College are immersed in Standard Australian English. Learning a language is much easier when you are immersed in it.
- A 'captive audience'. As residential students and as teenagers, our residential program supports consistent attendance and learning how to learn within this kind of environment.

The second step was to **clarify what the school was trying to achieve**. Some of the matters agreed were:

- identify the specific needs of our Indigenous students when they arrived at the College and attempt to provide success in open and diverse educational pathways
- ensure that success is measured by achievement in developing English literacy and numeracy and also that it would be measured by individuals continuing through learning pathways that lead to work or further education
- provide access to a range of support services (doctors, hospital, counsellors, vocational advisers).

The next step was to **develop a whole school strategic approach** built on the achievement of these goals, firstly and very importantly through establishing relevant policy:

- Two places on the College's Governing Board were reserved for Indigenous members. The Board's revised Employment Policy provided a basis for increasing the level of Indigenous employment. The Professional Development Policy required that all staff must undertake professional development in cross-cultural awareness and that all teaching staff must undertake professional development in ESL teaching methods. In the Middle School all Indigenous classes were to be maintained at an average of 22 students. (Two classes are prioritised for 15 students only.) Staff across the College would be given specific targets to achieve each year in their particular areas. These targets will be in line with the relevant whole school targets.

These are some of the aspects of **translating this approach into practice**.

- Grouping students according to English literacy ability and their experience with school education. There are three main programs. Generally:
 - students who speak English as a first language are integrated into mainstream programs;
 - students who speak English as a second language and who have consistent attendance backgrounds in schooling are placed in mainstream ESL programs; and
 - students who speak English as a second language and who do not have consistent attendance backgrounds in schooling are placed in an Intensive ESL program.

All these programs are designed to maintain strong Indigenous identity while at the same time developing student understandings and skills in Australian secondary education programs. Students within the ESL programs become integrated into mainstream programs as they progress.

- Setting out to ensure that all students obtain a recognised credential. Courses include those available through Northern Territory Certificate of Education (which includes VET options) and the International Baccalaureate Diploma.
- Conducting a variety of cross-cultural programs for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The most successful have been in areas not related to English literacy where students are working together on a project and over time develop understandings about each other.
- Offering Australian Indigenous Languages subjects at Years 11 and 12.
- Providing a specialised tutoring and homework program four evenings a week to support effective learning in the day school program.

Read more detail about this process at: www.whatworks.edu.au/3_3_9.htm

Pastoral support

Primary considerations about ‘pastoral care’ for Indigenous students are that:

- It should be based on knowledge of Indigenous students, their families and their community.
- It should occur in partnership with families and communities.
- At the same time, it should involve ‘case management’, focused on students as individuals.
- It should be focused initially on fostering students’ learning. Where students have other health or social needs, appropriate agencies should be involved.

Where there are concerns about ‘discipline’ or ‘student management’, the same considerations can be applied. It is important, though, to deal with curriculum matters first; in other words, ensure that the best curriculum knowledge is being used. Schools need to be confident that they can keep their part of a bargain that goes like this: ‘If you attend and participate you *will* learn.’

Read more about these matters at: www.whatworks.edu.au/3_2_1.htm

A principal’s view (BOURKE, NSW)

When he was principal of Bourke Public School, Paul Loxley made the following comments:

“From a kid’s point of view the fundamental thing is for them to be coming to an environment that is safe and one where they feel happy. It’s not about control. It’s ‘participating in’ and ‘with’.

From the teacher’s perspective, they’ve got to realise that if we didn’t have the kids, we wouldn’t have a job. They’ve got to understand the kids come first, second and third — always. On a day-to-day basis we each come to school with a different role and in some instances different responsibilities. I do my job to best of my ability and I expect each of them to do theirs.

The main message we try to send is that we make every effort to treat the kids the way we would like them to treat us. Everyone does something good. You’ve only got to find it, then you can tell them. We all love to be told we’re doing a good job.

We talk certainty rather than severity. In classrooms that’s particularly important, because the teacher might have 30 kids and won’t have the time to take one out and say, ‘Look George, you’ve done the wrong thing. Let’s talk it through.’

Every one of our kids knows what’s going to happen. It mightn’t happen while that lesson’s on, it mightn’t even happen at the next break, but it’s going to happen. And we talk little bits. Some people would say, ‘Right you’re off the playground for a week or a month.’ We’ll say — five or ten minutes. We’re not running a correctional facility. We’re running a needs-based community school. It’s about kids and we talk about little bits because you both win that way. The kid can do it, they’ve done the consequence, you can thank him or her and it’s out of the way.

And we talk positive reinforcement. We don’t acknowledge negative behaviour — we handle it — and everyone knows what the processes are. But we go out of our way to acknowledge positive behaviour.”

Read more of what Paul had to say: www.whatworks.edu.au/3_3_11.htm

Kormilda College (NT)

Kormilda College's circumstances are described earlier on page 19. Julianne Willis, the Deputy Principal, talks about its Student Services Centre:

“The College has always had lots and lots of kids come through our doors who bring problems with them. Originally we had a Counsellor, a Chaplain and a Nurse and each of those people worked in isolation. And in a sense, you could say they were working on the areas they were employed to work on, so the nurse was doing the medical kinds of things and the counsellor doing the counsellor kinds of things.

But, gradually over a long period of time and with lots and lots of experience we started to collect data about what the situation actually was. ... The statistics have told us that of the 240 Indigenous students at our school, at least two-thirds of them present with some sort of physical, emotional, social or health issue. And these issues are complex and require specialist skills to understand what's going on and to be able to help. We've moved from thinking that we're just an educational provider to understanding that if we don't deal with these issues, or at least try to work with other organisations to do specific things, then the issues might never be addressed. And outside agencies are under-resourced as well.

So we've started to say, well we're a community and the issues are being presented here, so we have to do something about the situation. The Student Services Centre has a manager, who's the Head of Student Services, two Chaplains, a Welfare Officer and a Nurse and they're able to draw on other assistance when they need it.

The way it works is that in the normal school structure there are home group teachers and 'house parents'. Students are allocated to classes and to residences and so there are people who are working with them on a daily basis. Of course, there are behavioural and other consequences for inappropriate behaviours. If students start to present with particular issues, the individual teacher will try and work with those, but if things unravel and they find out more and more about a situation, there are Level 1, 2, 3 and 4 structures for both intervention and support services. That's where Student Services comes in.

Depending on the particular student, case management might include talking with the parents (even if they are in a remote location) and then there might be a diagnosis component and following that we are able to work out individual management plans. But what it all comes to is that we actually have to get the kinds of people in our school community who can access the specialist skills that can help us deal with poverty, with such low self esteem that kids are self harming, with suicide, with drug and alcohol abuse. For many families, schools are realistically going to be the place where these things are actually identified. So schools have to position themselves around not just the educational agenda, but the community agenda and realise that we are centres of community. ...

I resent it when I go to a meeting and someone implies that the kids are not coming to school because schools are alien places. In many cases now, schools are safe havens and it's the world around them that is such hard work.”

Read more about Kormilda College at: www.whatworks.edu.au/3_3_9.htm

Queanbeyan South Public School (NSW)

Aboriginal enrolment at Queanbeyan South PS, close to Canberra, is about 15% of a total over 600. Paul Britton was Principal for almost ten years. In 2001 and 2002, violent behaviour was increasing in the school and the numbers of students on detention and suspension were rising.



Paul Britton.

Paul talks about what happened:

“We were finding that our discipline procedures were sometimes just further alienating kids, and often the ones you can least afford to alienate, because your relationships may not be strong. And the same kids were in trouble again and again. It just wasn't working and we needed to find a new paradigm.

There were two ways of reacting to the situation. One was to make discipline harsher and the other was to look for something different. We opted for the latter approach.

We were looking for strategies that taught students moral and ethical behaviours without diminishing their relationships with their peers and teachers. We wanted students to learn about and accept the consequences of their behaviours. We wanted them to not re-offend. We also wanted them to be reaffirmed as individuals as they learnt these skills, within the supportive framework of family and school. We wanted to develop their sense of empathy and identification with their victims. We wanted the students to be empowered, rather than become powerless 'victims of the system'. We saw this as part of their education, as part of their learning about themselves, the world and their part in it.

So we collected data about detentions, suspensions and critical incidents involving some sort of verbal or physical violence against teachers.”

After a detailed review of the situation it was decided that the problems needed to be tackled simultaneously on a multitude of fronts, all centring on strong teacher-student relationships. The concepts of 'Real Justice' and the work of its proponents came to the attention of the school, and this approach was implemented.

Paul continues:

“The way we used to think about 'discipline' was in terms of punishment. And we forget why we punish. Usually it's as a deterrent. But too often it just alienates and the same kids are in trouble time after time.

Real Justice is a way of trying to get them not to do it again without necessarily alienating. I think it goes back to Indigenous ideas about bringing extended families together when someone has done something wrong. Anyway, it's good for all kids, but it's definitely good for Aboriginal kids here, because (when there's a big, important incident) you bring in family members and that helps to reduce alienation.”

There has been a significant decrease in both detentions and suspensions since the introduction of the program.

Read more about the project at Queanbeyan South PS at:
www.whatworks.edu.au/3_3_6_3_3.htm

Improving outcomes in literacy

Literacy in Standard Australian English (SAE) is as central to the educational success of Indigenous students as it is to the success of other students. But, broadly-speaking, the literacy levels of Indigenous students are below those of their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Issues related to the development of literacy learning are complex. There is disagreement, for example, about exactly what might be meant by the term ‘literacy’ itself. Research approaches have yielded programs with differing emphases and their own ‘languages’. Schools have seen these come and go, and teachers pick and choose from among the literacy pedagogies they have been exposed to. In relation to literacy for Indigenous students in particular, there are other possible crucial overlays — dialectal differences, for example or learning English as a second language — which may go unrecognised or be accommodated inadequately.

But it is important in literacy learning, and more generally, that we have high expectations of Indigenous students and pursue evidence-based methodologies. Regardless of what we think ought to work, professional action should be on the basis of what can actually be demonstrated to work. **Don’t ignore what you already know about effective practice in literacy teaching and learning.** The *What Works* materials do not advocate a single way of literacy learning for Indigenous students, but they do provide information about several approaches which have produced improved outcomes.

The ‘Deadly Ways to Learn’ project (WA)

The ‘Deadly Ways to Learn’ project set out to collect, create and critique two-way bidialectal classroom practices in 14 Western Australian schools. The concept underlying these practices was to promote parity of esteem between the dialects of Standard Australian English (SAE) and Aboriginal English.

From the introduction to a project publication:

“Aboriginal English is a dialect of English and is an important marker of cultural and linguistic identity among Aboriginal peoples. It is the home dialect of a large proportion of Aboriginal people across Australia, including those living in metropolitan and rural locations.

Aboriginal English is sometimes confused with Indigenous languages and creoles. It is a variety of English that has been modified by Aboriginal people to reflect and carry Aboriginal culture and world view. It has been described as ‘English words with Aboriginal meanings’.

Standard Australian English is another dialect of English. It is the dialect that predominates in government, business, law, media and public life, and is most frequently the dialect of instruction in Australian schools and tertiary institutions. Given its role as the dialect most commonly used in such circles, Standard Australian English is often described as the ‘dialect of power’ in Australia today.

While Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English share many common features, research has found that there remains an identifiable range of differences evident in such things as sounds, word selection, word meanings, grammar, ways of organising ideas and ways of interacting with others. ...

Given that the dialect of instruction in Australian schools is Standard Australian English, students who speak languages or dialects other than Standard Australian English need explicit language instruction and support to achieve outcomes set down in curriculum frameworks. This group includes students who speak Aboriginal English. At no point, however, should these students gain the impression that they are required to replace their home dialect with Standard Australian English. Rather, teachers and school communities should understand how to broaden their students’ linguistic repertoires to the extent that they are able to code-switch at will between language varieties.

3 *Deadly Ideas: A collection of two-way bidialectal teaching strategies from the Deadly Ways to Learn project, p. 6.*

Code-switching involves more, however, than being able to speak two or more codes. It also involves being able to judge which dialect will best serve one's needs in any given context. This is determined by things like audience, purpose, content and situation, but will also be influenced by choices made by the language user and what messages he or she wishes to give out about him or her self. All these options and skills need to be explored and explicitly taught at school so students who speak a non-standard dialect at home are equipped to participate fully at school, and empowered to participate fully in the wider community outside school.”³

The process

The project started with a professional development forum which all 14 participating teachers attended. An opportunity was provided for the teachers to learn about Aboriginal English and two-way bidialectal education, and to reflect upon issues that emerge from such an approach.

Each teacher used the ESL Bandscales to collect baseline data about the Standard Australian English development of target students with respect to reading, writing, speaking and listening. Qualitative data was collected about relevant inclusive teaching practices, use of Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEWs), community participation, and general school-community contexts. In each school, teachers and AIEWs engaged in action-research: reflecting on issues discussed during the forums and looking for ways to incorporate ideas in their schools and classrooms.

A second forum was then held. Significantly, this forum involved equal numbers of AIEWs. While the first forum was characterised by listening and responding, the second forum was characterised by problem solving, collaboration, and discussion. It had a positive and profound impact on all participants.

Project coordinator Rosemary Cahill talks about the work:

“Two-way education occupies a fine line, and a good balance between ‘Aboriginal way’ and ‘traditional schooling way’ remains (at present) a rare and wonderful thing. Among the target students being taught by teachers who have struck a productive and respectful two-way balance, there is evidence of good literacy progress, an awareness of two alternative dialects, and of attempts at code-switching.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have been partners. Every non-Aboriginal teacher participating in the project has been partnered by an Aboriginal person (normally an AIEW, but where an AIEW was not available, by an Aboriginal community member). The AIEWs involved in this action research have become more confident about their work, their relationships with teachers, and in the legitimacy of their place in the planning and delivery of educational programs for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Teacher perceptions about the role and ability of AIEWs have changed significantly. Where AIEWs were previously perceived as a valuable extra pair of hands in the school, they are now more frequently viewed as integral members of staff who provide important cultural and linguistic insights to curriculum planning and delivery. ...

Whether these strategies prove successful seems to be less to do with what the teachers do, and more to do with what they believe. Teachers' beliefs about Aboriginal English, world view, and Aboriginal ways permeate their incidental reactions to things students do and say in the classroom.”

Read more about the project and related resources at: www.whatworks.edu.au/4_2_1.htm

Deadly Writin', Readin' and Talkin' (SA)

Salisbury North R-7 School has been involved with 'scaffolded' approaches since 1998, when the Deadly Writin', Readin' and Talkin' (DWRAT) Project began with Australian Government funding as a Strategic Initiatives Project (SRP), part of the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program. At that time DWRAT Coordinator, Bronwyn Parkin, met Dr Brian Gray of the University of Canberra, who agreed to support the school during the period of the SRP in using the 'Scaffolding Literacy Program' (now referred to as 'Accelerated Literacy') he had developed with his colleague Wendy Cowey.

DWRAT Coordinator, Bronwyn Parkin contributed the following notes about the scaffolded literacy approach at Salisbury North.

“It consists of the careful study of one quality written text per term, using that text as the basis for reading, sight words, spelling and writing. Using functional grammar as a tool, teachers and students pay close attention to the text, and the strategies that writers have used to achieve their purposes. Gradually, as the students become knowledgeable about the text, they are able to appropriate these strategies, as well as the spelling, and use the original author's resources to produce their own quality texts.



Bronwyn Parkin and students.

There are many other features worthy of note in the pedagogy:

- Repetition: The study of one text has typically covered 10 weeks of a term. A first reaction by many teachers is that students will get bored. They don't get bored, they become successful.
- Choice of texts is crucial to the process. Rich texts with literate, rather than 'spoken' grammatical structures that will assist students in accessing more complex texts are selected at a level of literary complexity commensurate with the child's age.
- Language for talking about texts: Functional grammar is used as a rich resource for talking about texts. Comprehensive notes are provided to assist teachers.
- Pre-formulated questions: We try to ensure that all students have the chance to respond successfully to questions. We preface each question with an introduction to the question, a preformulation which tells the students the purpose and scope of the question so that all students know what is in the teacher's head.
- Spelling: Words are not taught as spelling words until students are able to read them out of context, and then students are encouraged to use their visual skills to learn groups of letters, rather than only 'sounding it out'.
- Potential for critical literacy: The depth at which we study a text provides many opportunities for students and teachers to develop critical analytic skills.
- Student behaviour management: Time spent on controlling minor behaviour issues is time not spent on literacy. Therefore we focus on the learning at hand, rather than on minor behaviour issues. We have seen some encouraging changes in student behaviour as students become successful and begin to make sense of their learning. However, behaviour management is sometimes still a struggle in our context.

Read a more detailed account of scaffolding at Salisbury North at:

www.whatworks.edu.au/4_2_3.htm

Read teachers' views about scaffolding in a secondary school setting at:

www.whatworks.edu.au/4_2_3_5.htm

Read about scaffolding in a remote setting at Wulungarra Community School:

www.whatworks.edu.au/3_2_4_10.htm

Improving outcomes in numeracy

Ideas about improving outcomes for Indigenous students in numeracy cover a lot of the same territory as longstanding discussions about improving the quality and impact of mathematics teaching. The use of the term ‘numeracy’ with its strong implications of practicality makes this even more emphatic.

The idea of ‘working mathematically’ has been defined and institutionalised at some levels of education. Working in context, collecting and organising data, seeing and describing patterns, creating theories, using strategies and skills to prove or disprove those theories, applying these to actual social and physical issues and communicating results are familiar concepts.

But another, older idea of what it means to ‘work mathematically’ at school has proved resistant to change — ritualised behaviour, barely contextualised sums, right and wrong answers, all bedded comfortably into the idea that maths, ‘real maths’, is hard, boring and accessible only to some.

Will Morony, Executive Officer of the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers (AAMT), puts it like this, in the context of discussing a particular initiative in Indigenous education:

“The whole ritual learning performance in maths is really seductive. Teachers can say — hey I’ve got these kids busy — the kids can feel good about getting a whole bunch of ticks, but it isn’t what matters. It is part of what matters, being able to go through the rituals of writing out a computation, but only part of it. The understanding and the knowledge of the mathematics isn’t robust. This is by no means unique to Indigenous kids and their teachers, but certainly the people we’ve talked to have said it’s a particularly dogged issue to get at.”

Read more about the project being discussed at: www.whatworks.edu.au/4_3_1.htm

Although, as Will points out, ritualised learning of mathematics is unlikely to be effective it is still often found in classrooms of Indigenous students. The reason for this is not entirely clear, but it may be because what is going on is recognisably ‘mathematics’. In any case skilled teachers of mathematics do not rely on such approaches and we suggest that:

- Improvement in numeracy outcomes for Indigenous students will occur if effort is made, using what is already known about good practice.
- One foundation of good practice is an understanding of how students are constructing mathematical ideas in their own heads. This is of value in relation to *all* students, but is particularly valuable when students are not achieving success.

Western Australian, Pam Sherrard, put it like this:

“We need to look at student performance and find out what and how the children are thinking about mathematics, then relate that to the way the teachers are teaching. If teachers taught differently, then the students might perform differently. The outcomes that the children achieve and the behaviours they show will be very dependent on how the teacher is teaching. So if the teacher is teaching maths in a way that the answer is the all-important thing, then the teacher will probably never have the opportunity to get into the children’s heads to find out what and how they are thinking. The way we teach maths has to shift from emphasising getting answers using set procedures on paper to talking about how we can find answers and how we’re thinking about problems.”

Read about Pam’s work taking these ideas very seriously at:
www.whatworks.edu.au/4_3_2.htm

Another aspect of good practice can be a shift away from ‘book work’ to numeracy activities involving task-centered approaches, and teaching of the specific skills required.

For example, in the INISSS project in Tasmania:

“Some of the features of these tasks are that they are intended to activate concrete and visual learning and involve significant challenge. A good task has multiple levels of success and multiple entry and exit points, while balancing skill and process outcomes. The tasks are also intended to have three ‘lives’ — for a 10 minute challenge, a whole class lesson and an extended investigation. They are designed to encourage high levels of access and engagement and to diminish the ‘trepidation’ factor.”

Read more about the INISSS project ‘s approach at: www.whatworks.edu.au/4_3_3.htm

A further aspect of good practice can be to embed aspects of numeracy in the ‘real world’ of students’ communities.

‘Numeracies in Indigenous Communities’ is a resource developed by DECS Aboriginal Education in South Australia through funding from ANTA. It is intended for schools and TAFE sectors across Australia and consists of a set of tasks aligned with numeracy as a family and community practice, together with numeracy stories from community people.

It includes:

- A CD with video snapshots of Aboriginal community members on how they use numeracy in their lives (social, family, shopping)
- Seven hands-on problem-solving tasks developed from the stories
- Integrated software which allows for extension of learning
- Teacher and learner notes with extension options.

Read more about ‘Numeracies in Indigenous Communities’ and how to access it at: www.whatworks.edu.au/4_3_5.htm

Maths in Context (NSW)

‘Maths in Context’ is a NSW Department of Education and Training program that takes up some of the ideas above. It involves Indigenous community members in identifying and supporting opportunities for numeracy learning in everyday activities.

Chris Simmons is the coordinator of the In-Class Tuition program at Moruya Public School. She talks about what happened at Moruya, and how various units of work were derived.

“First we had meetings with our local Aboriginal community and we worked with them to help decide the topics for Maths in Context. They talked about things that were important to them, such as fishing and wood carving. Then we had a day with [Aboriginal Education Assistant] Craig Connell, plus four community people and four teachers and we mapped out where we were going to go from there. And now we’ve written units for Stages 1, 2 and 3. We looked at the areas where our Koori kids weren’t doing so well and we tried to design units to deal with that.



Community meeting at Moruya.



Chris Simmons.

You can get Maths out of all these things. With the fishing one, we'll be going to the river, doing mapping and using compasses. Then we're going to do experiments with fishing lines and hooks and sinkers and get into 3-D shapes and tessellations. Then there's breaking strains of fishing lines. And then we're going to South Head and we'll have a day out there where Koori people will come and talk about middens.

And we are going fishing as well for the maths in it, but a lot of parents will come with us. Two local Koori families who fish commercially for a living are going to throw a net out for us from a boat and pull it in for us. They're also going to give a talk to the whole school at some stage about what fish they catch in the river and what months they catch them.

Then kids will make their own graphs. Stage 1 will just be copying the teacher's graph but they'll get pictures of the different fish and stick them in the right places. The Stage 3 kids will do their own graphs. Part of the new 'working mathematically' syllabus is that the kids actually have to pose their own questions, so each child will make up a question and they'll swap questions. Such as 'what's a good month to fish for a particular fish?' Stage 3 will also go to the extent of putting a monetary value on each fish and how you could make the most money from fishing.

But the thing is that there will be ten to fifteen activities that the kids will move through in a very structured and supported way. And for teachers, we're giving them all the resources they need to teach like this. They won't have to do extra preparation."

Read more about Moruya PS at: www.whatworks.edu.au/3_2_2_5.htm

At Queanbeyan Public School, a slightly different approach was taken. Deputy Principal, Vicki Muscat, talks about it:

“We believe it has been a huge focus and made a huge impact in our school. The first thing we did was go to Sydney for training. When we came back, we needed to get the community to come and talk about it, and that was a most amazing experience. We advertised this by saying ‘we don't want to tell you something, we want to know what you think.’ As a result, we had the biggest roll-up of our Aboriginal parents to anything. And the first question I asked on the day was ‘what do your kids come to school with?’ In other words, ‘what do they know already?’ Then we went on to ‘what do they need to know?’



Community meeting at Queanbeyan, Vicki Muscat at left.

The parents talked first about the kids having knowledge of art, the enjoyment of science, a sense of family and gossip! And the thing they concentrated on that the kids needed to know about was money... how to handle money and how money works.”

“And we've kept a core group meeting every couple of months for two years, helping develop units of work. We report to every ASSPA meeting as well and their support has been important. It's turned out to be very successful for our Aboriginal kids, but it has been inclusive of the non-Indigenous kids as well. That's supported very strongly by our Aboriginal parents.

Two years ago, teachers were finding that our Koori kids weren't really engaging with maths. Now they do! And we've found that these units have given them a focus and the teachers have become enthused as well.

Our quantitative data two years ago showed that the Koori kids were, on average, way below where we wanted them to be. These days, the data show that they're catching up. Some are working beyond the expected outcomes.”

Read more about Queanbeyan PS at: www.whatworks.edu.au/3_3_6_3_3.htm

The early years

The value of pre-school education is well-established. The continuing productive influence of early intervention and its comparative cost-effectiveness with that of later efforts to repair patterns of performance and behaviour make it a crucial area to focus on.

The proportion of Indigenous five year-olds not in formal education (just under 15%) is more than twice the rate (about 6%) for other young Australians. The gap is considerably greater for three and four-year olds.

Indigenous people value early childhood education for similar reasons non-Indigenous people do, but two of the defining factors in successfully increasing rates of participation are:

- the presence of Indigenous staff and/or parents, and
- well-established personal cross-cultural relationships and a climate which is 'culture-friendly'.

Read about South Australian research into these matters at: www.whatworks.edu.au/4_4_1.htm

The MCEETYA Taskforce paper 'Effective Learning Issues for Indigenous Children Aged 0–8 Years', makes the further point that 'Educators and parents/caregivers need to acquire 'transitional cultural competencies' so that they can operate more comfortably in both non-Indigenous and Indigenous communities, interpreting each to the other with the respect of members of each and building up mutual community capacity.'⁴

Read the complete Taskforce paper at: www.whatworks.edu.au/docs1.htm

4 MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education, 2001, 'Effective Learning Issues for Indigenous Children Aged 0–8 Years', p. 4.

Kempsey South Public School (NSW)

Kempsey South Public School on the north coast of New South Wales has implemented a number of initiatives to improve transition arrangements for its Indigenous students. It has an enrolment of about 200 students, of whom over half are Aboriginal and most of those are *Dunghutti* people. Kempsey South is home to people of predominantly lower socio-economic groups.

One initiative is a transition program. The usual pattern is that it operates for six weeks, once a week from 9.00–11.30 am, in which pre-schools work with the current Kindergarten class. The sessions are run rather like the first week of school, with reading times, play times and so on. Pre-school children are able to learn how to respond in the school situation. The school makes the following further points about these activities:

- Parents are invited to attend the first two weeks and encouraged to leave the children for the last four.
- All children attending are tracked and if a child does not attend a home visit is made.
- Health files are kept on each child. A child with a health problem has a health alert card.
- Transport is usually provided by parents and/or the pre-schools themselves, but assistance is provided to anyone having problems attending.
- In the last week of the program, pre-schoolers are invited to stay for morning tea with the infants.
- Information sheets are sent home.
- A Kindergarten booklet is made, containing photos of Kindergarten children.
- All children go home with their own 'starting school' bags.



Another initiative is the buddy system. This involves taking Year 3 and 4 children to pre-schools, where they read to pre-schoolers who are likely to go to the school in future. That way, when the children eventually go to school, they already have a friend and a face they know. Where possible, connections are made within families, so that older brothers and sisters help younger ones. It became a reward for the Year 3 and 4 children to be able to go to the pre-school. And at the same time it improved teachers' knowledge of the pre-school environment.

These are some of the other ways in which the school collects information and communicates about its potential students, through:

- 'Schools as Community Centres' activities such as the 'Starting School Expo', held in a vacant shop in Kempsey in the mall on a Thursday. That's pay day, so it's shopping day and a lot of people are in town
- the pre-school reading program, in which teacher's aides and AEAs visit pre-schools to sit in small groups with the children and learn about books
- home visits throughout the year
- the school newsletter, asking for early enrolments
- parent information sessions
- an information pack for parents, which contain enrolment forms, before school screening materials, bus forms, pupil information sheets and school brochures, and
- the weekly South Kempsey Mums' Group craft activities for parents and children (0-5), held in the Resource Room.

Read more details about the programs at Kempsey South: www.whatworks.edu.au/4_4_4.htm

The middle years

This section focuses on the end of the primary years and the earlier years of secondary school. These stages of schooling pose a number of challenges for any students, and they deserve special attention for Indigenous students in particular.

First, the transition to secondary school can be disruptive and disconcerting. Students often find they are moving from a secure and predictable environment to one which seems uncertain and difficult. It is easy to get lost in the transition.

Second, students can find problems maintaining motivation and interest as they move through the early secondary years. Adolescence is often a contributing factor to this, as are the increasing demands on students. For Indigenous students in particular there is often a lack of suitable role models and the rewards of staying at school can seem distant and difficult to attain.

And yet we know that Indigenous early school leavers are at highest risk of long term unemployment. For this reason, among many others, we need to work on strategies which increase retention rates of Indigenous students through secondary school.

Karama Primary School (NT)

Karama is in the north-eastern suburbs of Darwin in an area with a lot of government housing. About one-third of its students are Indigenous.

The following information was drawn from an interview with Principal at the time, Bob Hale, and Aboriginal Education Adviser, Sheree Ah Sam.

“Bob: For a long time we were concerned about the dropout rate of our Karama kids once they go to high school. The majority of the kids are able to survive in the system and we aren't overly worried about them, but there's a significant number of them either dropping out or showing signs of poor attendance.

They go into an environment that's foreign to them, going from extended contact with one teacher here to, say, nine teachers at a high school. We try to counsel the kids that they need to be responsible for their own actions, good or bad, and there are appropriate consequences. So they go from a school where the suspension mechanism is rarely if ever used, to high school environments where it's all too common. Once they're suspended they become typecast as trouble makers, and they can keep getting suspended until such a time as they drop out of the system.

“Sheree: We also found a lot of the boys, it was mainly boys — late grade 8, early grade 9 — would drop out for two or three years and then try to get back into the system again. A lot of them had set goals for themselves and they realised that they had to have the education, but they become frustrated.

“Bob: The most important thing is to listen to the kids. There's little to be gained in being authoritarian with them, because in a lot of cases they are quite used to that and they will respond quite negatively. The other thing is to get away from stereotyping. Each one of those kids is an individual, has individual needs, individual hopes and aspirations and expectations. Now Sheree spends four mornings a week at Sanderson High and the rest of the school week here. It's a sort of a bridge between the primary and the high school.



Bob Hale, between pre-school assistant Tania Hill (left) and Aboriginal Education Adviser Sheree Ah Sam.

“**Sheree:** What I’ve been doing at the moment is going over term one’s results with them, how they did academically. A lot of the kids have fear. One of the questions I asked the kids was, how do you feel about going to high school, what’s your biggest fear of going to high school? And it was the bullying. They thought they were going to be bullied.

Read more about Sheree’s role at: www.whatworks.edu.au/4_5_1.htm

Read Bob’s handbook for staff at: www.whatworks.edu.au/docs/karama.pdf



Aboriginal mentor, Mick Hayden, with Year 8 students in the Grow Tunnel.

Merredin Senior High School (WA)

Merredin Senior High School in Western Australia has about 7% Aboriginal students. The school has devised a cross-disciplinary project that produces a variety of local trees, shrubs and native food and medicines in a Grow Tunnel. Student activities emphasise retention of local knowledge and culture related to the local flora and long term aims include developing training opportunities, promoting the retention of Aboriginal students through the secondary years and promoting culturally inclusive programs.

A knowledge base of local flora and related cultural heritage is being developed with the assistance of the local Aboriginal community and community members, as well as Aboriginal mentor, Mick Hayden, are involved in working collaboratively with students.

Teachers have found ways to incorporate this work into a variety of curriculum areas.

Read more about the way the curriculum is organised at:

www.whatworks.edu.au/3_3_6_2_2.htm

North Rockhampton State High School (QLD)

North Rockhampton State High School in Queensland has provided an off-campus centre (‘Full Service School’) to cater for students at risk of not completing Year 10.

It was decided initially that the location of the Full Service School should be away from the main campus of the school. The feeling was that students who were not experiencing success in the school environment might benefit from a clearly differentiated setting.



Although the target group is young people in the 14–16 age bracket who are seriously at risk of not completing Year 10, the Full Service School has also attracted some older students. At any time, about one-third of enrolments are Indigenous. In 2004, about 50 students are enrolled. An Indigenous presence is an important part of the environment through a teacher aide provided by CDEP and part-time assistance through ATAS. Teacher Hella McShane says that ‘Indigenous students need an Indigenous presence in their schooling. That’s where Indigenous aides come in. We would employ more of them if we could.’

Principal, Peter O’Beirne spoke about the Full Service School:

“ Although they’re off-campus, the students are officially enrolled at North Rockhampton High, so their numbers are part of the school as a whole. So in a sense, the Full Service School is another classroom of North Rocky High that just happens to be several kilometres outside the fence.

Although the environment is very different, the emphasis is on getting a Year 10 certificate. It’s a real thing, it’s not a mickey-mouse certificate and everyone knows that now. So there’s that credibility in parents’ minds and in teachers’ minds back in the mainstream schools and that leads to them supporting the place. The real point here is on their last day of the year when the Year 10 certificates are given out, there are more family members there per capita than there would be in the mainstream school. There are grandmas, aunts and uncles, young brothers and they’re all there to see the kids get their year 10 certificates.

Read more about the Full Service School at: www.whatworks.edu.au/4_5_5.htm

VET activities in secondary schools

A successful strategy can be to include some hands-on VET activities in secondary schools. These may not necessarily be directly linked to post-school employment or training but can be motivational for Indigenous students, especially when Indigenous staff are also involved.

Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture has a history of working with Indigenous communities and has been able to link with schools to provide VET where suitable facilities are otherwise limited or non-existent. Timo Gobius, the coordinator of the Aboriginal Rural Training Program spoke the program.

“ Teachers know that Aboriginal kids need reasons to stay at school. There has to be something they can grab onto, something they think matters to them, something that’s real life, where they can say, ‘that’s great, I know why I’m doing that’.

Mostly we work with Year 9 and 10 students, but some older ones as well. They decide what modules they’re going to do. You give a certain amount of information and you give the parameters of what you’re able to do and then they decide.

It seems to me that it’s important that it’s the school that’s offering them these courses. Whether somebody else delivers or not, they see it as the school offering it to them and so do the parents. Then there’s a spin off because the parents can support the school and the school is supporting the parents. So that’s a positive for the school.

It’s really important to have defined outcomes and to break each skill down, break it into manageable chunks and deliver one small chunk at a time. Now that won’t always suit the learners because they’ll want to jump right in, they’ll want to get into the full blown thing straight away and maybe they won’t like the skill building process. But at the end of the day when you evaluate it and ask ‘what about when we did the skill building in the morning?’, they’ll say ‘oh yeah, that was a good idea.’”



Timo and student in the sheep yards at Trangie, New South Wales.

Read more details and examples of VET in schools at: www.whatworks.edu.au/4_5_4.htm

The senior years

Although increasing numbers of Indigenous students are succeeding in Years 11 and 12 they are still only half as likely at present as their non-Indigenous counterparts to complete secondary school.

5 Mercurio, A. & Clayton, L. 2001, *Imagining Themselves, Imagining Their Futures: Indigenous Australian students completing senior secondary education*, Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia.

Imagining Themselves, Imagining Their Futures: Indigenous Australian students completing senior secondary education is the product of a project designed to reveal the perceptions and ideas of Indigenous students who successfully completed their South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) in 1999.⁵ Here are some extracts from a related paper by the same authors discussing the narrative analysis in that research.

The day the postie came

At the time this paper was written, the authors Antonio Mercurio was Manager, Curriculum Development, and Linda Clayton was Project Officer for the Aboriginal Education Strategy at the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia (SSABSA).

“On a day in December, close to Christmas Day, the postie comes, bringing news to those students who have succeeded in Year 12 — and those who have not. It is a day of public reckoning, a day that is met with equal doses of anticipation and fear by most senior secondary students and their families. Receiving the news can be a critical moment in the lives of young people, and in the lives of those in their communities.



Antonio Mercurio and Linda Clayton.

Sixteen Indigenous students shared with us their thoughts and feelings about how they dealt with their ‘moments of truth’, and how their families reacted to their news. They graphically recounted their stories of ‘receiving the results’.

“And as I was opening it up I was walking into the lounge room
Where all them other mob was.
And I said, ‘Oh, here’s my results.’
And Auntie [named] goes, ‘Results for what?’
And I said, ‘Oh, my SACE!’
‘My, um, completing Year 12!’
And she goes ‘Oh — well, whatcha get?’
I said, ‘I don’t know yet.’
And then I only had, like, one little bit, just on the end to open up!
And I was just standing there looking at it
And I said, ‘No, I never done it. I never passed.’
And she goes, ‘Do you want me to open it?’
And I said, ‘Nuhnuh-no, I’ll do it, I’ll do it!’
So I quickly opened it up.
And took it out, I read it, I went, ‘Uhh, I passed!’
Oh, it was just the biggest thrill of my life. (‘May’)

What we heard from successful students was a range of emotions — apprehension, fear, delight, satisfaction, exhilaration, relief, and at times, disappointment. In these stories, the students narrated their avoidance tactics and their anxiety.

What is clear from these stories is the great symbolic importance of the senior secondary certificate to the students, their families, and their communities; and to the way they imagined themselves, and to the way their families and communities imagined them.

The awarding of a senior secondary school credential, such as the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE), or its equivalent around Australia is a public act. It is a public recognition of those who are ‘capable’, ‘passed’, ‘completed’, ‘finished’, or ‘have graduated’. This is a rite of passage leading to further education, training, work, and citizenship.

Read the paper in full at: www.whatworks.edu.au/docs1.htm

Mercurio and Clayton dealt with several research questions, two of which were answered as follows:⁶

6 Mercurio, A. & Clayton, L., *ibid*, pp. 101f.

What do the Indigenous students themselves understand about how and why they were able to succeed?

- Successful Indigenous students see commitment, dedication and organisation as critical.
- Successful Indigenous students see the need for support.
- Successful Indigenous students place high symbolic value on completing the SACE.

What insights can be gained from the way Indigenous students understand how and why they were able to succeed?

- The importance of imagining themselves as students, Indigenous Australians and citizens.

The implications for policymakers

- Focus on success.
Our research has shown us that it is worthwhile for policymakers to focus on success by looking at aspects of the programs of study, levels of achievement and the perceptions and experiences of those Indigenous students who succeeded. ...
- Interrogate the public measures of success.
It is important for policy makers to remember that success will be defined at two levels at least — at a private, individual level and at a public level. Our research has shown the critical importance of definitions and measures of success to the lives and futures of students — particularly the public measures referred to in this study, that is, the completion of certificates and the TER. We believe that such public measures of success need to be interrogated not only because their values are dependent on the individual notions of success, but also because they do not have a simple, linear relationship with predicting future success in further study or work. ...
- Appreciate the importance of completion to students, families and communities.
Perhaps the most important finding of the study is the critical importance to their perceptions of themselves, to their families and communities, that the Indigenous students we interviewed placed on completing the certificate, on ‘passing’, on ‘getting it’. The completion of the certificate is a marker of success, of transition to further education, employment and life.

The Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project (WA)

(The words *Gumala Mirnuwarni* are taken from the *Yindjibarndi* language meaning ‘Coming Together (*Gumala*) To Learn (*Mirnuwarni*)’.)

The project operates at Karratha Senior High School and its Roebourne annexe which are located on the north-west coast of Australia in the Pilbara region. Karratha is the port which services the vast iron ore projects of the region, the North West Shelf natural gas development and a substantial saltworks.



The desire of Hamersley Iron to employ Indigenous people in skilled categories of employment had been frustrated by the fact that Aboriginal students were not completing high school. It was the view of Hamersley Iron that the future opportunities for work in the Pilbara lay in skilled work and that, if there were to be satisfactory employment opportunities for Aboriginal people, there needed to be improved educational outcomes. A broad partnership was formed and a steering committee set up.

The target group for the Project was those students wanting to and having the potential to succeed, and having the family interest and support to do so. (The term 'family' is defined by the students' and community's views.)

Strategies used to achieve the aims of the Project include:

- the establishment of two Enrichment or Homework Centres
- the provision of tutors
- the provision of school-based mentors
- the organisation of camps as well as visits to industry sites and tertiary institutions.

A compact was signed by participating students, their families and the project steering committee. This compact committed each of the signatories to carry out agreed requirements, including regular attendance at school.

Some striking results were achieved with a much higher number of students going on to tertiary education, VET courses and employment. Lessons from this project have been used to inform the Western Australian Department's 'Follow the Dream' project which is being implemented in 40 schools across the state.

Read more about the strategies used and the results of the project at:
www.whatworks.edu.au/4_6_2.htm

Booroongen Djugun College (NSW)



Booroongen Djugun is a phrase derived from the two local Aboriginal languages and means 'Sleeping on Home Ground'.

The Booroongen Djugun Aboriginal Corporation (BDAC) is located near Kempsey on the NSW Mid North Coast, in the traditional lands of the *Dunghutti* and *Gumbaynggirr* people. One arm of BDAC is the Booroongen Djugun College which began offering community based programs in 1994. It is a registered training organisation which conducts industry approved and nationally recognised courses in areas such as Management, Health, Childcare, Horticulture, Catering and Community Services.

Responding to concerns that Indigenous students were developing a pattern as early school leavers, Booroongen Djugun College wanted the students to have the opportunity to achieve an accredited VET qualification while still at school, enabling them to become more competitive in the job market when they left school.

Aboriginal students and other students 'at risk' from the six local secondary schools have the opportunity to spend one day each week at Booroongen Djugun College. All of the following levels of health care course are offered and all are accredited by the New South Wales Board of Studies:

- non-vocational health care 'taster' courses for Year 9 students
- Certificate III level vocational courses in nursing and aged care for students in Years 10, 11 and 12.

These courses can lay the foundation for the development of a career path in health and associated fields. The day takes the form of what is referred to as 'circular learning', which Booroongen Djugun believes is an authentic Indigenous learning style.

Read more about the learning style and outcomes at: www.whatworks.edu.au/4_7_1.htm

www.whatworks.edu.au



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