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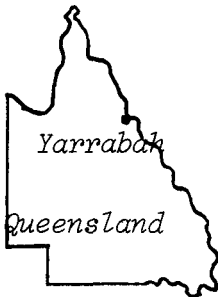
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ACROSS AUSTRALIA

FROM TEACHER TO TEACHER



YARRABAH PROGRAM 1975

R. Schuurmans,
Yarrabah, Qld

Yarrabah is an Aboriginal community of approximately 1200 people. The community, although close to Cairns, is isolated by a 3000 ft mountain range. The people identify more with the community than with individual tribes. A few crafts remain; Aboriginal languages are known but are not now spoken. So, in comparison with the communities further north, it is fairly westernized. The Grade 8 class is attached to the primary school. It is considered as a transition year from primary to secondary.

Before the first week of school was over it was evident there were vast differences in ability and attainment levels in the class of eleven boys and twenty-three girls. Through a variety of testing procedures, students' performance levels in the basic skills of numeracy and literacy were tabulated to give a composite picture of the class.

The immediate perceived problems were:

1. There was a large range of chronological ages from 12 to 15 years. This meant a corresponding range in maturity levels.
2. The students seemed to have little desire to work.
3. There seemed little motivation to continue education to high school where absenteeism and the drop-out rate amongst Aboriginal students were large.
4. The wide range of abilities from illiteracy to average Grade 8 prohibited the use of a normal Grade 8 syllabus.
5. Similarly, to repeat Grade 7 would provide no more stimulation and possibly cause further withdrawal.

6. It seemed likely that a vast majority of the students could be drop-outs from school and fending for themselves in the near future.

To cope with these major problems I formulated two broad and basic aims. These were :-

- a) To stimulate interest in learning.
- b) To prepare students for life.

A course had to be designed taking into account these major problems, as well as the following specific learning difficulties:

- lack of language skills;
- variety of aspirations;
- lack of knowledge of the outside world;
- lack of western concepts of space, time, mathematics, science and society;
- limited listening skills;
- short attention and concentration spans;
- 'tropical afternoon'.

The specific aims of the year's education were developed and extended as the course progressed. These aims were :

- .. To provide stimulating, relevant and locally based study material in an effort to increase learning and communication skills, practical mathematical skills, research and library skills, practical art and crafts.
- .. To develop individual and group problem-solving skills.
- .. To integrate work in all subject areas as well as indoor with outdoor activities.
- .. To develop an acute awareness of each student's total environment, namely, psychological, social and physical.
- .. To develop knowledge and interest in areas of possible future vocational training.
- .. To develop attitudes, knowledge and skills to assist the students to become more effective and successful as they develop into adult members of the community.

In short, the aim was to enable the students to operate successfully in the Australian community at large and the high school system as they will find it.

These aims are still being continuously revised as the students progress and surpass expectations.

Due to the inadequacies of the students, skill-building in English and mathematics was the consistent basic core to the year's work. To develop concepts and stimulate interest, differing themes were used. These themes included:-

- . preparing a newspaper - *Bad News*;
- . museum excursions;
- . 'the farm', that is, gardening;
- . Atherton Tableland;
- . Green Island;
- . Brisbane
- . work experience, for example, classroom assistant in lower grades and kindergarten.

None of these themes was a discrete unit operating for a set period of time. The themes were used to extend the concepts used in skill building to a more practical and interesting application.

The problem areas for each individual were isolated and then continuously tested objectively, and constantly reinforced by revision. These skills were then developed and extended by a variety of teaching methods - particularly through competition games in individual and group situations.

The techniques and strategies being used are already in use in primary schools. By adapting this approach to a secondary content course it has allowed all students to work at maximum potential through individual and group work programs; it also provides variety and motivates students to work further through successful experiences. Despite a large class in cramped facilities, discipline problems were minimal using this group approach.

To illustrate this group approach and the emphasis on skill

building, let us look at a typical day - Monday 26th May, 1975.

8.30	General Interaction	Record playing General knowledge Games in action etc.
9.00	Morning Talks	a) Instructions - listening skills b) Word building - word registers c) Memory d) Lecturettes e) Role play - drama

Activities a) to d) are controlled by a group of students, three to six, at the board.

Another group, three to five, are creating and rehearsing mime and role playing. These groups are generally selected on a social basis. This introduction is designed to stimulate the students into a frame of mind where they are willing to work almost solidly for the next three hours.

9.20	Mathematics	The class is divided into three groups of varying size. All groups do a program of mental maths. The classroom assistant takes the low ability group.
10.20	Free Reading	The class is divided into three groups, depending on the student's reading ability. The books used are the three series <i>Bomar</i> , <i>Trend</i> and <i>Topliner</i> . Students have to complete a reading log and a short comprehension passage. A group of four are taken out by the assistant for Booster and Data reading.
11.00	Reading and Comprehension	<i>Explore and Express</i> is read to the class. Discussion amongst all class. Silent re-reading. Mental and written comprehension.

Hard word analysis - word attack skills, for example, syllables.

dictionary
prefix
suffix
sentences

11.45 Writing

Group 1 - an ability group, write stories for *Bad News*.

Group 2 - a social group on Library Project, research lecturette topics.

Group 3 - an ability group, do remedial reading and comprehension.

LUNCH

1.30 Science

Discussion involving whole class. Class divides into seven social groups for Activities and Experiments.

2.30 Music

Analysis of the latest songs. Singing - guitar.

3.00 Break

3.30 Basket ball

Extra curricular

4.30 Gymnastics

Extra curricular.

This program allows for flexibility, but to maintain a steady influence it was considered advisable to adhere to a structured timetable.

This year I have attempted to develop and use methods and content as close as possible to the needs of the Yarrabah students. There are some problems with this type of approach, the major one being noise.

..... With only limited standardised testing* it is difficult to judge

* The Gap Reading Comprehension Test was administered which showed a reading age change from 8 yrs 2 mths to 9 yrs 3 mths, i.e. an improvement of 13 months in 8 months.

how successful this scheme has been. It is obvious, however, that the students' general enthusiasm, awareness and desire to learn, have increased dramatically. Also, the problem of absenteeism has been almost eliminated.

There are now two teachers for the thirty-four students, and this has allowed us to extend our group work, introduce more individualized instruction, and use greater variety in content and methods

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Milingimbi



READING WITHOUT TEARS AT MILINGIMBI SCHOOL

M. Christie,
Milingimbi,
Via Darwin, N.T.

Something had to be done. The Gudschinsky approach, which we had been using for two years in our bilingual program, was working well with a group of children who happened to be both bright and making it to school five days a week. However, a large group had tried with the Gudschinsky method and, either because they were not yet ready for this approach to reading, or through irregular attendance, simply never got off the ground. The other children, in the middle, were off the ground but fluttering precariously.

The 'never-off-the-ground' group was given to me. It comprised over twenty children, about ten of whom would be at school on any one day. They were second and third year infants with whom I had an hour and a half every day in an open classroom. The children knew me well and I could speak to them in Gupapuyju (or in English to the one or two children from other settlements whose language was not Gupapuyju). Gupapuyju speaking children read in Gupapuyju, the others in English. Elements from the Ashton-Warner¹ approach and the Language Experience² approach were used.

The method was simple. Each child had a large paper bag with