



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

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ACROSS AUSTRALIA...

FROM TEACHER TO TEACHER

MURGON STATE HIGH SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE EFFORTS
TOWARDS THE INTEGRATION OF STUDENTS

M.J. Matthews
Deputy Principal
State High School
Murgon, Qld

MAIN OBJECTIVE

Beyond the usual educational goals, the main objective of Murgon High continues to be a constant working towards the harmonious integration of students from various communities in a way that is beneficial to all students.

SPECIAL AIM

The stated special aim of the school is to develop a student who understands and respects peoples of divergent backgrounds and cultures. The ramifications of such aims and objectives are far reaching. For the purpose of this paper, I wish to restrict discussion to those that can be classed as "administrative" measures, relating generally to school management as conducted by and involving staff. Many of these measures arise out of staff discussion and involvement on a co-operative, committee basis.

OPENING DAY - Years 8 and 11

Traditionally, opening day each year has received much attention. On this day we accept only Year 8 and 11 students for enrolment and, more importantly, orientation. The latter group has opportunities in the first three days for socializing by participating in mixing activities. This is an essential process, since the Year 11 population consists of students drawn from four other rural communities. As Indigenous students from Cherbourg have already been attending since eighth grade, it is interesting to note the settled qualities of their behaviour which contrast with the unsettledness of the newcomers from the outlying secondary departments.

THE FIRST YEAR GROUP

The Year 8's, on the other hand, are settled into their school program more quickly to accustom them to changed routines. Unsettledness as a trait of behaviour in the newcomers at this level is much more noticeable in our indigenous students. The change for them involves a shift from the security of the Cherbourg Community to Murgon community in which they find themselves in a minority situation. The change is, inevitably, traumatic.

STRATEGIES DEvised TO REDUCE TRAUMA

To reduce this trauma, a five-pronged attack was launched on the problem. Because of the fact that the Cherbourg intake in 1978 had participated in the Van Leer Program, this group of students was used in an experiment intended to preserve the gains made under the Van Leer Program. If the exercise proves successful on evaluation later, the technique trialled could be extended to include pupils from other primary schools at the close of 1978. The five strategies used with the Cherbourg group at the end of 1977 were:

1. High school staff working with the Year 8's in 1978 visited Cherbourg State School to familiarize themselves with the pupils and their environment.
2. Visits by the administrative team coincided with the parents' visit to the Primary School for the completion of Aboriginal Secondary Grant applications.
3. Cherbourg pupils visited the High School and worked a one-day program.
4. Pupils returned to the High School with their parents, taking them on a conducted tour of the school, and joining the staff in a luncheon.
5. Indigenous aides visited the Primary School to observe pupils at work and to discuss groupings with the Year 7 teachers.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Further socializing exercises with the Year 8's are conducted during the annual Year 8 camp at the Maroon Outdoor Centre. The predominant theme of the camp is one of social development,

fostering both inter-dependence and self-reliance. Groupings are such that students from all feeder schools are sure to mix, and activities are designed so that inter-dependence is necessary. Supporting and reinforcing experiences at the camp, is a course in social development, introduced for the Year 8 students. This is conducted by form teachers, two of whom are allocated to each class.

THE FIRST YEAR CENTRE

With special consideration given to staffing allocation for the Year 8's, what has in effect been achieved, is a First Year Centre. Incoming students are placed in four homogeneous groups located decentrally in a "home room" system. Two of the classes are set side by side to provide scope for experimenting with variation of groupings and team teaching. Apart from specialist staff for the teaching of music, physical education, manual arts, and home economics, staff allocations are such that there is a maximum of interaction with an absolute minimum of staff - in most instances three. The curriculum in use as yet is traditional, but because of the highly experimental outlook of the whole program, there is a leaning towards integrated studies.

Teachers involved in the program are given added time consideration. Heading the team is a co-ordinator with an allocation slightly above that of a subject master who has a half work, half organization allocation. The remaining Year 8 staff have periods allocated for co-operative planning and parent interviews over and above the usual preparation and correction time. To date, all reports on these arrangements have been favourable.

THE YEAR 9 EXPERIMENT

Anticipated gains in Year 8 must be projected into Years 9 and 10 and this means a re-structuring of Year 9 in such a way that the underlying philosophy of integration is in no way lost. The first concept of structure to be removed from the traditional course offerings is that of level, where previously a Level 1 course and a Level 2 course were offered. Careful streaming in Year 9 was effected this year and both students and parents counselled on course selection. The result was that slower learning students can be given the full benefit of a greater teacher-student interaction. Groupings have been made on an educational basis with aptitudes and abilities carefully monitored rather than on an ethnic bases, as had been happening, much to our dismay. When level differences existed,

it appears that parents of European slow-learners were insisting that their children take a higher level course because a particular subject from that course was needed. When advised that this was not necessary and that the students would cope better with the lower level course, parents revealed the real reason as related to the high indigenous student content in the lower level course.

TRIAL STREAMING

The machinery necessary for better placement is being trialled in 1978. The Year 8's of 1977 were placed on an order of merit list compiled from totals of standardized scores in the five subjects undertaken by all Year 8 students. As well, a common maths test was administered because of the three levels of maths offered in Queensland high schools. On these bases, the group taking Advanced Maths was determined. Thirty students belong to this class group, which exists for English, Mathematics, Sport, Physical Education and Religious Education. A further thirty-two taking Ordinary level Maths form two class groups for English, Maths, Sport, Physical Education and Religious Education, but combine with the top stream to make viable class groups in such other subjects as French, History and Geography. The remaining thirty-two are slow learners and/or under-achievers, who are set in two class groups operating independently of all other Year 9 students on the timetable. Undeniably, levels or streams still exist, but the educational initiative is taken and controlled by the school in order to avoid the misplacement of slower-learning European students in higher levels and the gravitation of indigenous students to the lower level.

FURTHER PROJECTIONS

This gravitation is manifest in other areas such as sport and religious education. This can be best explained in terms of peer group pressures and of the sense of security derived from group support - a safety in numbers idea. Added to these is the fact that there are sports in which the indigenous students are so adept and interested, for instance, rugby league and basketball. Because of this, much time is spent together on playing fields at home as well as at school.

SPORT

To offset these trends in an attempt to effect greater integration, changes have been wrought in sport organization and content. The class groupings formed by the strategies to effect

better integration trialled with the Year 9 students are the class groupings used for sport periods and the school's physical education program. The concept of a sports afternoon has been lost and along with it, hopefully, the undesirable behaviour of unmotivated students lacking challenge as well as interest.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The same class groupings are used for conducting the newly introduced Religious Education curriculum. This program is being run on a non-denominational basis by four clergy and six approved staff members. Although some parents of one faith have requested that special contact be made with an approved lay member of their church, all but the few students who have parental exemption, participate in the new program.

CONCLUSION

It becomes obvious that the school fabric must undergo change since, like the society it reflects, it is in a state of flux also. Other than appearing a rather rambling account of goings on at Murgon High, I trust that there is one obvious thread which runs through the school fabric. A clear statement of aims and objectives - in this instance the integration of students of divergent backgrounds - has resulted in considerable discussion on school organization.

Decision-making and action by all staff members has resulted in a number of arrangements which are being trialled as ongoing attempts to produce the desired educational and social outcomes.

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