



# The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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CURRENT INITIATIVES WITH YEAR 8 STUDENTS  
AT YARRABAH SCHOOL



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COMMUNITY MANUAL TRAINING CENTRE\*

In January 1976, a course was started in Manual Training and Technical Drawing for Grade 8 students at Yarrabah. Our aim was to introduce all the basic tools and instruct students in the skills of carpentry to a degree where products would be strong, functional, and have some quality in their finish.

During the first six months we worked from simple to more involved projects, items being made alternately for the school and the student. These included squares, bench clamps, T-squares, tool carry-alls, student ports and drawing tables. Girls were also involved but to a lesser degree.

We outgrew the area beneath the school, so we looked for an old house to renovate and adapt to our needs. We were offered land and cement. On joint consultation with the Community Council, the Manager and the Education Department, we planned, as a teaching project, to build a Community Manual Training Centre, to be used by the school, apprentices in the community and other interested parties. The finance was by 'beg, borrow and ultimately buy' method from many sources.

We designed a building 20m x 6m incorporating work benches, lock-up tool and item storage, manual arts and technical drawing teaching areas. Room was also provided for timber and large job storage. It was decided that the site was to be amongst the other workshops of the community for easy access to the skilled tradesmen and professional equipment. The students would gain from a workman involvement rather than school subject approach.

Contact was made with the Officer-in-Charge of Aboriginal

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\*Ross Schuurmans, Grade 8 Teacher.

Rod Delaforce, Officer-in-Charge, Aboriginal Further Education.

Carl Luppi, Manual Arts Instructor.

Alan Watridge, Manager.

Further Education in Cairns. He agreed to run a similar carpentry course with a group of young adults in the community, the end result being trained students and a completed Manual Arts Centre.

All students were then involved in the full process of design, felling of timber, milling, laying out, boxing and pouring the concrete, setting up studs, rafters and roofing. From then it was interior finishing. It was impressive to see how keen students were with *their* project. We feel our aims were achieved with the boys and the young adults. The following year prizes were won for work completed by those same students in a Cairns competition.

From the original idea to the completion of the exterior took three months. The finishing of the interior continues as student projects. The Palm Island community is now operating a similar scheme while many other groups have visited the Centre and displayed keen interest in running a similar program in their own community.

#### SPORTS AND CULTURE WEEK

Much of our successful teaching at Yarrabah with the Grade 8's was based on high interest projects. With these projects, students played an important part in the decision-making process, as well as actually performing the tasks. They were able to enjoy the fruits of their labour. All projects had real life application and this could be seen clearly in the day-to-day workings of the community.

The Sports and Culture Week was a project carried out by the students requiring three months of preparation and a week of administration.\* The major aims were:-

- a) To facilitate social interaction and integration of the isolated community Aboriginals with the urban and rural groups, through sporting contacts and cultural exchange.
- b) To put to an elected Student Council, representing the five different groups, major decisions concerning the running and discipline of the camp.

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\*Schools participating in the camp were Aurukun, Kowanyama, Trinity Bay and Cairns High, and Yarrabah.

- c) That the sporting program to be organized, umpired, rules taught, championship draws made out and prizes presented by Yarrabah Grade Eight students.
- d) To gather together a large group of resource people in a live-in community situation, where students can observe and participate with Aboriginal and European 'experts', displaying and teaching their special talents.

In the months of preparation, the students applied for fundings, in addition to raising money on their own. They organized bus and air transport for themselves and their visitors, arranged accommodation and catering for the 100 students and fifty adults at Yarrabah, and at Tinaroo National Fitness Camp. Letters of invitation were composed, typed and mailed to possible resource personnel, and visiting students were informed of needs and costs. A publicity campaign produced spray-painted cards, wall posters and printed T-shirts. Underlying all this was the fertile opportunity to teach standard English in formal and in informal situations. The students were willing to revise work repeatedly to have it perfect for public reading. Timetables, expense budgets, distances, quantities etc. acquired concrete meaning through our preparation effort.

The aims set for the resource people were to teach students a skill that was not only possible, but easy to put into practice on returning home. Active student participation was to be encouraged, even to the extent of the students learning a 'trade' and becoming a resource person. With over fifty resource people visiting during the week there was a wide variety of choice in the subjects offered, some of these being: Aboriginal art, landscape water colours, modern art, tie dying, macrame, wire jewellery, legends, bark painting, foreign cookery, newspaper reporting and publishing, first aid, gymnastics and trampoline use, electronic band playing, acoustic guitar, pottery, bottle cutting, traditional dancing, making and playing of the didgeridoos, instant clothes making, canoeing, basket weaving, spray painting and silk screen printing. Simple home technology combined with western and traditional methods produced some unique results, while the cultural exchange aspect fostered some memorable experiences.

More than half of the resource people were of Aboriginal descent. Groups such as the band and corroboree dancers combined their teaching with entertainment and trip supervision.

The program was basically:-

Friday - At Yarrabah

Day: Billeting and accommodation for visitors.  
Tour of local area.

Night: Dance - Yarrabah Band. Organizing and  
catering by Grade 8 Company.\*

Saturday - Day: Travel to Tinaroo National Fitness Camp.  
Students' Council Elections with first  
meeting following.

Night: First session of art and craft for girls.  
Volleyball instructions and organization  
of teams and draws.  
Boys' volleyball championships.

Sunday - Day: Athletics Meeting. Boys and girls in  
three age groups. Competitions represent-  
ing the five regions. Organization by  
Grade 8 Yarrabah.

Night: Films.

Monday - Day: Cultural displays with arts and crafts  
instruction.

Night: Corroboree by Aurukun and Kowanyama.

Tuesday - Day: Team Sports Day. Basketball, softball  
and soccer. Students to be taught the  
idea and rules of the games and where  
possible arranged their own teams, scoring,  
draws and umpiring.

Night: Dance with music from the Yarrabah Band.

Wednesday - Day: Swimming, tour of local sights. Groups  
depart.

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\* A Company formed of Grade 8 students to illustrate the working  
of a business enterprise.

Although the camp started slowly due to extreme shyness, cold conditions and the large number of strange faces suddenly living in close company, by the second day both resource people and students mixed freely and were actively engaged. Teachers commented on the greater degree of involvement than they had previously experienced at school. Extra resource people arrived even though teaching was unpaid, with 'bring your own material' proviso. Meals and beds were provided and many adults stayed much longer than they had originally intended, sharing their talents with students and other resource people alike.

The three months project had produced noticeable improvement in our year long aim -

To encourage confidence, initiative, forethought, responsibility and co-operation.

A sincere thanks to all those who gave their time, effort, and money to make the camp a success.

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*THE ABORIGINAL CHILD AT SCHOOL*

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*Note: Schools with a significant Aboriginal enrolment are entitled to one free copy of each issue.*

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