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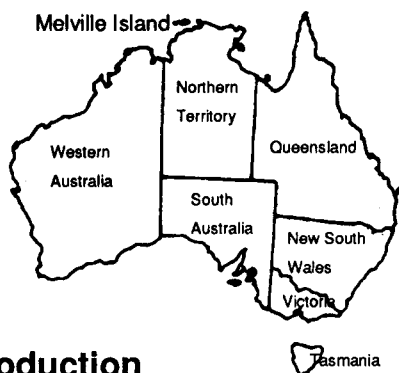
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Section D — Teacher to Teacher

An Extended Negotiated Narrative in an ESL Classroom

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Introduction

In October 1995 a short novel, *Tammy Damulkurra*, was published by Aboriginal Studies Press. *Tammy* was the result of a six-week narrative writing program undertaken with a class of teenage girls at Maningrida

Community Education Centre, in the Northern Territory. The girls, Charlene Bonson Djarpi-Djarpi, Alison Cooper Gangarnda, Jacqueline Phillips Galamarrjin, Evette Dawn Pascoe, Sabrina Yulumurru Dhurrkay, Rhonda Brown Guykaladawuy, Eileen Bonson Djinjirrow, Simonne Lawrence, Justina Williams Wilinggirra and Roseanne Darcy Wangaytcha, are mostly Burarra, speak English as a second or third language and in 1994 were studying for their General Studies Certificate with me in Eagle Class.

We needed a novel to study, and though teenage literature is plentiful, few novels are relevant to contemporary Aboriginal life. After an extended and



The Sunshine Girls

Plate 1: Back Row Left to Right: Jacqueline Phillips Galamarrjin, Charlene Bonson Djarpi-Djarpi, Sabrina Yulumurru Dhurrkay, Alison Cooper Gangarnda

Front Row Left to Right: Simonne Lawrence, Roseanne Darcy Wangaytcha, Deborah Taylor.

Photograph courtesy Derek Pugh

fruitless search we decided we should write our own. We did, and the success of the program, including development of written and oral English skills, the raising of self-esteem and other, unexpected spin-offs for the class prompted me to write this paper.

The Program

The program began with a round table conference to develop a character. I had some ideas prepared if needed, but the girls' imaginations started to fire immediately. Tammy Damulkurra's name came from a girl named Tammy who was visiting from Darwin, and Damulkurra, meaning eagle in Burarra, from Eagle Class.

We brainstormed what Tammy would look like, what she liked doing, who her friends were, her boyfriends, her family and her traditional country. Very rapidly the character took on a life of her own; we even drew a picture of her. Much of the information was quite specific and that night I wrote an orientation for the novel that described Tammy precisely and gave us a starting point for Chapter 1:

Tammy is 15 years old and 164 cm tall. She has long black curly hair which she keeps tied back with scrunchies, and she has a fringe. She usually dresses well and likes to dress like Rebel when she goes to the disco. She has dimples in her cheeks and plucks her eyebrows so they are very thin. Sometimes she shaves her legs ...

The Procedure

The actual novel began with me writing about 400 words of the opening scene — Tammy waking up in her house and coming out for breakfast. I introduced her and her family and included some of the information the girls had developed about her home life. I then turned what I had written into a worksheet for the girls to continue by adding questions at the end: What did he (her father) say? ... What did Tammy have to do now? ... Is it a school day? ... Does she have to get Emily ready? ... What happens next?

The girls wrote down their ideas and we discussed them. As a group we then decided which ideas were

best and what would happen next and that night I wrote them into the story. When the selected ideas were used up I turned the text into another worksheet with questions about what would happen next for the following day's writing.

This became the pattern for the six-week program. The actual text was written each night but it was the day-time lessons that drove it. The girls were anxious each day to hear how their ideas were incorporated into the text and keen to give it further direction. I added some information which I felt would improve the narrative, but only if it was approved by the class first. We included cultural information such as kin relationship rules that needed to be accurate, and the behaviour of the characters had to be realistic.

Dreamtime stories written by Alison Cooper and Charlene Bonson earlier in the year became part of the text when an old man told them to Tammy whilst they were sitting around the fire.

The Outcome

Most of the class became highly motivated towards contributing to the story. Writing each day, some of the girls soon filled exercise books with narrative. The use of paragraphs, speech marks, and fictional descriptions improved markedly in their writing. Some of the girls began to plan ahead in the story. For instance, the ideas for the last chapter were written in the third week of the program. The conferencing we did daily grew into lively discussions with nearly everyone participating fully. One girl's work I like to show off went from writing two or three lines in the first few days of the program to up to two pages daily a few weeks later. The pride this girl now takes in having been a part of the program is obvious to all who know her.

The writing of *Tammy* had further positive spin-offs. She became a vehicle for the discussion of health education and life skills issues. For example, in the story Tammy decides not to have sex with her boyfriend and finds ways of handling the problem intelligently. In the classroom I could ask what Tammy would do in a situation and the girls found Tammy was a non-threatening avenue through which delicate topics could be discussed.

The Story — Tammy Damulkurra

This is the life of a 15 year old Burarra girl, *Tammy Damulkurra*, who lives in Maningrida, but whose traditional country is further east along the coast at Gochilawa. Tammy is in love with a handsome boy named Johnny and she sees him each week at the disco. She has a rival for Johnny's affections, Sharon, and the two fight one day at school. As a result Tammy is sent to Gochilawa by her father and she spends a few weeks there fishing and hunting, and listening to Dreamtime stories told by the old people.

Tammy returns to Maningrida when her brother has an accident and she finds Johnny has made Sharon pregnant. Her whole life is turned around. She decides to leave for a while and moves to a boarding school in Darwin where, eventually, she meets her true love.

Editor's Note: *Tammy Damulkurra*, Derek Pugh and the Sunshine Girls (Charlene Bonson Djarpi-Djarpi, Alison Cooper Gangarnda, Jacqueline Phillips Galamarrjin, Evette Dawn Pascoe, Sabrina Yulumurru Dhurrkay, Rhonda Brown Guykaladawuy, Eileen Bonson Djinjirrow, Simonne Lawrence, Justina Williams Wilinggirra, Roseanne Darcy Wangaytcha), illustrated by Celia Adams, is published by Aboriginal Studies Press for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, GPO Box 553, Canberra ACT 2601. All royalties from the sale of the book go to the girls. *Tammy Damulkurra* is available from bookstores for \$8.95. □

Conclusion

The novel finished at about 15,000 words long. This makes it a 'skinny' and suitable for children to read quickly. The reading age level of the text is around 10-14 years. It is also one of the few narratives that deal with contemporary Aboriginal teenage life and probably the first to be co-authored by Aboriginal teenagers. It was published by Aboriginal Studies Press in October 1995 as their first published fiction.

Derek Pugh taught in Maningrida for six years, four of them in the homelands education section. He is now head teacher of Pularumpi School in the community of Pirlangimpi on Melville Island, Northern Territory. He is happy to receive enquiries from any interested teachers. His contact details are Pularumpi School, Pirlangimpi, Melville Island, PMB 51, Winnellie NT 0821. Phone: (089) 78 3961; Fax: (089) 78 3723; Email: Pularump@ozimail.com.au.

