



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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Section C: Schools

Bundaberg North State High School ASSPA Committee: Experiencing Success at School and National Level

Judith Selby

Bundaberg, Queensland



All of us are well aware of the problems faced by Indigenous students at the secondary school level. The intention of this article is to share a success story being experienced at Bundaberg North State High School in Queensland. How many of us can relate to the following anecdote?

A Student's Perspective

Kyrre Chippendale, Year 10 Student:

"When I started High School I was nervous about starting a new school but I liked having different teachers and subjects and I liked the shorter lessons. I liked Year 8 but by the end of the Year I was starting to get into a bit of trouble for talking too much in class. In Year 9 I was still in trouble with some teachers and I wasn't enjoying Maths and Science so I got into more trouble with the teachers there. I was still having fun with my friends but I thought some teachers were picking on me and I started to not like teachers. At the start of this year I wanted to leave school. One of the teachers even told me I should leave. I hated the teachers.

When we got the E-mates I started doing a lot of work on the computers 'cause I could take one home whenever I needed to. I went to the in-service that Ms Selby ran for us and I liked the E-mates 'cause they're easy to use. I got a B+ for the first assignment I did on the E-mate and then I got a B+ and an A on the next one and these were the first high marks I got this year. I've changed my mind now about leaving and I want to go on to Year 11 and pass. I'm not in as much trouble with the teachers anymore either and I'm getting along better with most of them.

It's good having Mum at school because when bad things happen to me and she's at school I can go straight to her and talk it over with her and we work things out. It's good having Amanda there too 'cause if I have trouble in classes I can go to her and she helps me and she can come into my classes or I can go out of class and work with her. I feel more comfortable at North High now and it's better."

Background of the Bundaberg North State High School ASSPA Committee

Naomi Commandeur, President and Parent:

Until the end of 1997 our committee was meeting once a month with the School Principal, Stuart Cochrane, in his office with three parents in regular attendance. While we were achieving in some areas, for example purchase of resources for school use and involvement in NAIDOC week, our progress was slow and we lacked real direction.

At the September meeting in 1997 Stuart mentioned that there was a teacher in the school who had come down from Darwin and was interested in joining our committee if we thought that would be helpful. Of course, we welcomed all the help and support we could get so Judith Selby was invited to attend our October meeting and at that meeting Judith joined our committee.

DEETYA was also hosting a Management and Training Workshop in October so Sue, Judith and myself attended that session. The workshop agenda included:

- DEETYA Corporate Goals/Vision
- NATSIEP & the 21 long term goals (including historical background)
- Overview of IEDA programs
VEGAS, ATAS, ASSPA
- Accountability, Income, Fraud, Risk Management, General Bookkeeping, Payment Record, Monthly Reconciliation, Petty Cash
- End of Year Report
- Carryover funds
- Release of funds in 1998
- Committee responsibilities
re: applications
- Changes in 1998
- Committees Responsibilities
- Roles & Responsibilities of Executive members
- Meeting procedures

An outcome from that workshop was that we began planning end of year activities for the junior school and working on our goals for 1998. We now had direction. An Aboriginal teacher-aide was employed by the school and she joined our committee at this stage and the Aboriginal Liaison Officer, Tom Douglas, working between Bundaberg North SHS and Bundaberg SHS, also began attending meetings so our group was growing and we organised the end of year activities with a view to 'breaking down the barriers'. Each activity had its own educational outcomes:

1997 End of Year School Activities 'Report of Educational Outcomes of the Project' to DEETYA:

• Ric Roser

Ric Roser is being invited to work in our school so that he might share his culture and knowledge with our students to begin to develop a positive understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal culture. One of our objectives, as part of the anti-racist school policy, is to familiarise students with other cultures to develop an attitude of racial acceptance. Ric will be working with different groups of students, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, in a 'hands on' approach where he shares his skills and knowledge in making tools/weapons, mixing ochres for painting, artwork, fire-making, story telling and general day to day living and survival skills, in a very informal, non-threatening environment. Ric has been chosen because he is experienced in working and communicating with young people and we wish our students to share in a positive experience with an Aboriginal person to begin to overcome prejudice, stereotyping and ethnocentrism in the students at our school.

• 'Self Image'

The band, Self Image, is being invited to perform in our school so that students, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, start to see Aboriginal people as 'successful' and capable of achieving their goals. This band is made up of Aboriginal students from Bundaberg State High School and we hope this concert will assist in motivating the Aboriginal students at Bundaberg North State High School to achieve their goals. Our objectives with this activity are to provide our students with successful role models who come from their peer group, develop self-esteem and self-confidence and to convey the message that it is possible to achieve your goals. In addition to these objectives for the Aboriginal students we want the non-Aboriginal students to see 'positives' in relation to Aboriginal people.

Once again our goal is to begin to overcome prejudice, stereotyping and ethnocentrism in the students at our school.

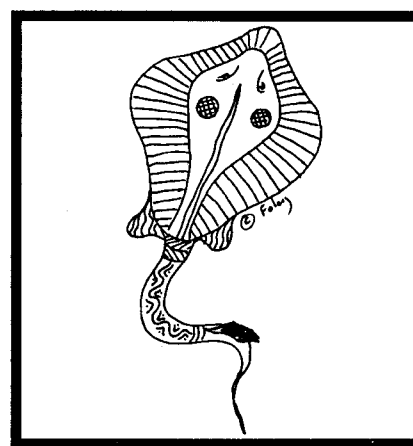
- **Fred Smith**

Fred Smith is being invited to work in our school so that he might share his culture and knowledge with our students in a group project of painting a mural while conveying to our students a positive understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal culture. Our objectives for this project are to involve Aboriginal students in a group project working with an Aboriginal artist to develop skills within a group context of sharing ideas and working together with a role model from our own culture, to produce a lasting piece of work and to raise the profile of Aboriginal students within the school community with the donation of this mural to the school.

Fred will be working with both past and present Aboriginal students in a 'hands on' approach where he shares his skills and knowledge in painting the mural within a group context of collaboration. Fred has been chosen because he is experienced in working and communicating with young people and we wish our students to share in a positive experience with an Aboriginal person who is an established artist in the community.

At this stage meetings were now being held weekly (and recorded) as we had so much to plan and implement. In 1998 Judith and her husband asked Sue if she could mind their little girl so we now had two 4 year olds at the meetings and we moved the meeting venue into the school common room. The school fully supported parents bringing their children with them. The new venue proved to be a positive step as it raised our profile in the school as a group because staff wandered in and out of the room throughout the meeting time. Parents with young children were welcomed and felt comfortable because of the space it allowed. We could also host in-services and hold social gatherings for students and parents and invite guest speakers along to address our meetings.

At the beginning of the year the students were pretty nervous about joining in with us but now they know we're there every Friday from 9:00am and we've noticed that they are more relaxed and often seek us out during our meetings. At our first meeting in January this year we received a letter from DEETYA outlining expenditure deadlines and we formulated a proposal for a tutorial program targeting Year 11 and 12 students with assistance in literacy and numeracy for one lesson per week within the school time table.



'Report of Educational Outcomes of the Project' to DEETYA:

- **Tutorial Program**

It is envisaged that a tutorial program, targeting Year 11 and Year 12 Indigenous students, be implemented at Bundaberg North State High School in order to provide students with assistance in numeracy and literacy. The problem of under-achieving Indigenous students in urban High Schools is apparent throughout Queensland and the Northern Territory. We believe that in terms of addressing the educational outcomes of Indigenous students the context within which Indigenous students learn must be supported in order that effective learning can take place. One of our objectives, in offering support to Indigenous students in numeracy and literacy, is to provide a supportive and non-threatening environment with a permanent teacher in attendance as tutor and the Indigenous teacher-aide in a student support role in order to encourage students to feel safe

and confident in seeking help and sharing problems in regard to academic pursuits. We hope to offer a tutorial lesson in Period 8 each Friday afternoon in which students can choose to receive assistance with any subject in which they are experiencing difficulty and where they can build on their knowledge of Mathematics and English.

The tutorial program began on the 6th March in last period with Judith Selby as tutor and Amanda Appo acting in a student support role. We purchased three E-mate computers for student use and loan, stationary and calculators. Judith's classroom was set up with posters, prints and information pamphlets on various forms of assistance available to make the students feel as if it was their room. At this stage Tom Douglas was appointed to Bundaberg SHS and our school employed Muriel Brown as Community Education Counsellor and Muriel joined the tutorial group from the second Friday of operation. She also joined our ASSPA committee, for which we are grateful. We then turned our attention to influencing the curriculum in an effort to introduce Aboriginal Cultural perspectives formally into the curriculum.

Joining the ASSPA Committee

When I attended the first ASSPA Committee meeting it reminded me of many similar groups I had seen in the Northern Territory where there were plenty of good intentions and ideas but there was often a lack of direction and organisational skills necessary to plan and implement the ideas. The school principal and two parents were the backbone of the committee and their enthusiasm and desire to support the educational aspirations of the Indigenous students attending our school was infectious and their welcome so genuine that I joined the committee. I knew that the experience and knowledge I had gained from living and working in the NT, and my organisational skills would be valued by the ASSPA Committee and I made the commitment to assist in any way I could. I had a teaching spare each Friday morning so we began meeting weekly and I took minutes of each meeting and instead of one or two people

having heavy workloads we all had a small task to complete most weeks. We soon began achieving many of the goals we set and the committee grew in size as well as confidence.

Presenting at a National Level

In November 1998 the North Bundaberg State High School ASSPA Committee presented a workshop at the National Indigenous Educational Conference, in Sydney, titled 'Supporting Indigenous Students in the Education System'. After receiving information on the conference with the emphasis on 'Sharing Knowledge' we believed we had knowledge to share with other educators in Australia and approached Indigenous Conference Services, Australia, in August, to present a workshop outlining the success we had experienced both in terms of student support and as an ASSPA Committee. Typically, we had low expectations of being successful as so often in past experience there are terrific plans which rarely come to fruition, whether it be due to lack of interest, finances or organisation.

We were successful in our application but at this stage we still held little hope of actually achieving our goal; there was the mammoth task of securing funding for the whole committee to get to Sydney, organising the workshop itself and gaining support from our families. We also needed to be confident that we could actually do this.

On the 18th September 1998, which was the last day of term three, we heard that we had been accepted to present a plenary and had been placed on the agenda for 24th November at 11:15am. School was breaking up for two weeks and when school resumed we would have exactly seven weeks to prepare – if we could access funding. At our first ASSPA Committee meeting in week one of Term 4 we decided to go for it. Our respective families were fully supportive of our goal and we set about achieving funding for our group of six adults and two students. After many letters and phone calls we managed to achieve funding for five members of our committee and

the two students by the end of week 5. We also had the mother of our second student join our committee so we had 7 adults and the two students working on our presentation.

We spent the next two weeks work-shopping our presentation during school time, after school and on weekends. We worked as a whole group, in small groups and individually and held our first full run-through on the Friday afternoon before our departure for Sydney on Saturday 21st November. On our arrival in Sydney we rehearsed our presentation with a reading, which we did again on Sunday afternoon after Conference Registration and Monday afternoon after Day 1 of the Conference. With permission from the Conference organisers, Tom Callaghan and Rose Aston, we also did a full presentation rehearsal on Monday evening and Tuesday morning.

The Conference organisers made our group feel very welcome from the time we arrived and on the first morning of the conference Tom approached our group and asked if our students would like to chair the afternoon session. The students were taken through the agenda by Tom and he outlined their roles for them. When conference resumed after lunch they introduced Ms Fay Nelson, Director Australian Arts Council and Dr Dennis Griffith, Executive Director Commonwealth Revenue Branch Northern Territory Education Department, assisted with overheads during the presentations, chaired question time for each speaker, and, following afternoon tea, chaired the introduction forum of the conference.

After this experience both students were over their anxiety about our presentation. They were so well received and complimented by conference delegates and realised that they were among people who cared about them and we were so proud of them as they were of themselves. We cannot thank Tom and Rose enough for the support they gave these two young people and the confidence their support instilled in them. At the end of Day 1 we were informed that the Keynote speaker for 9:00am Day 2 had cancelled

and we were asked if we would like this hour-long session. The adults in our group were still very nervous about our debut but we realised the students were excited and willing so we moved to the Keynote time. Our presentation was extremely well received by the Conference and we all spent a lot of time answering questions and discussing options during the remainder of the conference. Before talking about the outcomes of the conference for our committee it is relevant to include an overview of our presentation (see opposite page).

Outcomes

Presenting at a National Conference was in itself a tremendous professional development opportunity for each member of our group. The exhilaration each of us felt at the conclusion was uplifting and we took time, on the advice of Muriel, to spend a debriefing session together where we could all share our feelings and thoughts. At the conference dinner that evening we were approached to present at the International Indigenous Conference to be held in Hawaii in 1999. We were just so proud of our efforts and thankful for the support we continue to receive at the school level without which we doubt we would have journeyed so far in our efforts to support the Indigenous students at our school.

On our return to Bundaberg we continued to hold our weekly meetings and also spent extra time planning our program for 1999. The in-school tutorial program for senior students was time-tabled in for 1999 beginning week 2 of term one, a whole school assembly booked for week 5 of term one to present appreciation awards to all the people who made our conference presentation possible and our annual statement was completed for 1998 with carry-over funds allocated for 1999.

The outlook for our committee is extremely positive with the parents taking on all the major committee responsibilities and being confident about having input into the education of their children. For me this is probably the most exciting outcome of all. The barriers between the school

Bundaberg North State High School ASSPA Committee

Workshop Presentation:

'Supporting Indigenous Students in the Education System'

National Indigenous Educational Conference

'Sharing Knowledge'

Sydney, 23rd-25th, Nov, 1998

Presenters:

**Naomi Commandeur
Sue Chippendale
Judith Selby
Muriel Brown**

**Jason Long
Kyrra Chippendale**

**President/Parent
Vice-President/Parent
Assistant Secretary/Teacher
Committee Member/
Community Education Counsellor
Year 11 Student
Year 10 Student**

Overview:

- 1. Background of the Bundaberg North State High School ASSPA (Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness) Committee (Naomi)**
- 2. School Support and Training (Judith, Muriel)**
- 3. Influencing the Curriculum (Sue, Jason, Kyrra)**
- 4. Student and Parent Support:**
 - Tutorial program (Judith, Jason, Muriel)**
 - Parent and student perspectives (Sue, Kyrra, Naomi, Jason)**
 - Cultural respect (Naomi, Sue)**
- 5. Professional Development:**
 - 'Maths No Fear' – A Northern Territory Initiative (Judith, Kyrra)**
 - In-services (Judith, Jason, Kyrra)**
- 6. Conclusion (Naomi)**

and the community are being rapidly broken down as the parents gain confidence that they do have a major role to play in the education of their children and they are confident of their rights and want to have a say, want to be involved.

I would like to thank the following groups and individuals who made our presence at the conference possible:

Stuart Cochrane, Principal/Committee Member
Bundaberg North State High School
North Bundaberg Lions Club
Our partners and our children
DETYA
Jessica Purcell, Student/Typist
Doug Slack, MLA
Kepnock State High School
Paul Neville, MP
Indigenous Conference Services, Australia
Steve Flavel, Open Learning Support Unit, NT
Gillian Colasimone, English Teacher, Bundaberg North SHS

A Parent's Perspective

Sue Chippendale, Vice-President/Parent:

"...I am Kyrra's mother and ... she's come a long way and I'm very proud of her. Kyrra wasn't at all concerned about starting High School but it wasn't long before she started getting into trouble because she liked the social aspect of school more than the educational aspect. Kyrra was getting upset because she thought the teachers were picking on her and in Year 9 she started to get into more trouble because of her socialising and she developed an attitude of 'I don't care'. She didn't seem to like any teachers and she was achieving at a low level academically.

At the beginning of this year Kyrra was talking about leaving school at the end of the year. She got herself a job working part-time at Big W and she thought she'd leave school and work there full-time. While my husband and I thought that working at Big W was fine we wanted her to go further and have some direction and purpose in

life. We insisted on her completing Year 10 before she started working full-time anywhere. After a couple of months of cleaning shelves and folding towels Kyrra had an attitude change towards school and she decided she'd go on to Year 11 and find a more interesting career.

When we purchased the E-mate computers Kyrra borrowed one over the weekend and I've never seen her do so much school-work in her life. She was on the computer all weekend and even took it to motor-cross on the Sunday and she handed in an assessment item 27 pages long and got a B+. I was very impressed with her achievement and since then she's achieved an A for presentation of her resume and B+ for the resume itself and she'd done most of the ground work at home on the E-mate.

Having Amanda Appo in the school has also helped Kyrra because Amanda goes into her classes and this has settled her down as well as offered her support in dealing with teachers who can't recognise that a student is trying to change and wants to do better. Kyrra also knows that I'm in the school supporting her and that I'm there every Friday if she needs me and the teachers also know I'm there."

Conclusion

I am proud to be a member of the Bundaberg North State High School ASSPA Committee. We have all worked extremely hard to achieve the level of support that we have for the Indigenous students at our school and the reward, for me, is to see the growth in skills of every member on the committee and to see the students appreciating the efforts of this group on their behalf.

Meeting regularly and setting weekly tasks to achieve our goals, no matter how small they may seem, coupled with the commitment of all members is crucial to our success. The students know we value education and they know we are there for them and this support plays such an important part in assisting them to reach their full potential.

A Student's Perspective

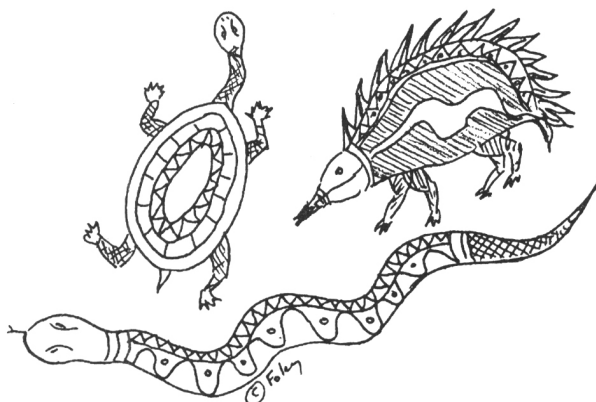
Jason Long, Year 11 Student

"This year has been pretty good for me. I get extra help with schoolwork in the tutorial sessions and it's good having Amanda at school too. She helps me with my assignments and she types them sometimes for me and she tells me I have to set an example for the young ones. I know I'm in Year 11 and I have to try hard for them and because I want to go somewhere I have to work more. I am trying to set a good example and some teachers are respecting this and I'm doing more now. This year I've done a lot:

- *I go to the tutorial every Friday*
- *I sometimes go to the ASSPA meetings if there's something interesting to me on there.*
- *I was in the Rock Eistedfodd and was a lead dancer and I came up with the ideas for the sports section.*

- *I am the only Year 11 boy House Vice Captain*
- *I got school certificates for: Basket ball, Rugby League and Touch*
- *I got a half colour for Athletics*
- *I was selected for:
Regional Football
Regional Touch and
QLD Athletics.*

It hasn't been all good because one teacher said "I don't know why you're here 'cause you're so dumb" and another teacher said "I shouldn't be here 'cause I'm too dependent on Ms Selby" but I don't listen to them much anymore. I'm going to do Year 12 'cause I want to do massage therapy or work in the mines and I need Year 12 for that and I think I can do it and I want to pass."



Ms Judith Selby has a Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood), a Bachelor of Education and a Master of Education from Northern Territory University. She began teaching in Darwin in 1989 and co-presented workshops on the teaching/learning of mathematics. In 1992 she co-published 'The Driver Model', worked in the Aboriginal Education Unit writing maths programs and participated in maths moderation and exam writing panels. Since moving to her current teaching location in Queensland, she has gained membership of the Maths A Panel and joined the school's ASSPA committee. In conjunction with Steve Flavel from the Open Learning Unit, Darwin, she also hosted "Maths No Fear" workshops for maths teachers and ASSPA committees in the Bundaberg area. In 1998 she received a Schooling 2001 award.