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Title: *The Swan Nyungar Sports Education Program: A school based approach to social inclusion for Aboriginal Students and their families*

Abstract

Prior to the commencement of the Swan Nyungar Sports Education Program (SNSEP) in February 2002, a feasibility study was undertaken to develop a risk management strategy for piloting a community based intervention targeted at Indigenous high school students in WA. A five-year demonstration project was proposed to supplement the capacity of schools to meet the special learning needs of Indigenous students. The feasibility study affirmed two non-negotiable principles: an environment that is supportive of a specialist program in sport for Indigenous students; and, a model of project development that is *inclusive* of all stakeholders. Building on a previous SPRC Workshop Paper outlining the initial design of SNSEP, "Social Enterprise: Partnership for Sustainable Change", this paper highlights the focus of the program as the development of a *working relationship* among students, teachers and parents, founded on shared knowledge and experience. The evaluation of the first year of the program has shown significant improvements in the retention and achievement rates of the students. However, it has also highlighted a number of challenges in the meeting and mixing of cultures within the context of the high school where the program is taking place. Cultural challenges have surfaced especially in five areas: pedagogy; curriculum design; engagement of families and elders; the relationship between the program and non-program staff; and administrative flexibility. The paper presents SNSEP within Balga Senior High in WA as a case study of an exercise in facilitating culturally sensitive social inclusion of Aboriginal students and their families in an educational and social context that has not previously developed a capacity in meeting the learning needs of Indigenous students. The evaluation of the first full year of the program suggests that the continuing viability and success of the program, however, depend on a stronger incorporation of the students' families, carers, and culture. There is also a need for a corresponding adaptation socially and administratively within the school to ensure a more culturally inclusive context. The paper concludes by identifying the responses to the challenges cited in the evaluation of the first year of the program, which are presently being implemented during the second year of operation.

Introduction:

While there have been some improvements in Indigenous educational outcomes, relative to the rest of the population, there have been little if any real gains (Gary et al 2000). Despite initiatives which have been introduced by Commonwealth and State / Territory governments in the last 20 years to improve participation in, and outcomes from, education among Indigenous students, they continue to be the most disadvantaged student group in Australia, with consistently lower levels of academic achievement and higher rates of absenteeism than among non-Indigenous students (Bourke et al 2000).

The limited engagement of Indigenous Australians with education remains one of Australia's most perplexing and serious challenges. Some have proposed the building of Indigenous learning communities as one way to respond to the challenge (Schwab et al 2001). They explore educational policy and program options for linking families, schools and communities (including business and government) to identify and address local needs through drawing upon local resources.

While the Swan Nyungar Sports Education Program (SNSEP) was not designed with Schwab's recommendations specifically in mind, the program does reflect the importance that Schwab places on linking families, schools and communities to identify and address local needs by drawing on local resources.¹ Indeed, this paper highlights the focus of the program as the development of a *working relation* among students, teachers, and parents founded on shared knowledge and experience. It also builds on a previous SPRC Workshop Paper that outlines the initial design of SNSEP, "Social Enterprise: Partnerships for Sustainable Change."

The evaluation at the end of the first year of the program, along with an evaluation carried out mid way through the second year, have shown significant improvements in the retention and achievement rates of the students.² However, they have also highlighted a number of challenges in the meeting and mixing of cultures within the context of the high school where the program is taking place. Cultural challenges have surfaced especially in five areas: pedagogy; curriculum design; engagement of families and elders; the relation between the program and non-program staff; and administrative flexibility.

Interviews have been conducted with program and non-program staff³ to determine the extent to which the challenges cited in last year's evaluation are or are not being met. An

¹ The design principles were drawn from a feasibility study completed in September 2000 to determine whether or not Balga Senior High School in WA could provide the type of context in which an Aboriginal sports education project could be located. See Goddard, D, Anderson, R, McGuire, J, McGuire, O (2000) "Improved Aboriginal Attainment in Education Through Sport", an internal report for Balga Senior High.

² Dr Dave Goddard and Robert Anderson of Simpson Norris International produced the "First Evaluation Report: Balga Indigenous Sport Education Project", for The Smith Family June 2002 and assessed progress in the Project from its commencement in February 2002 to school week 14, 2002.

A second report, "Balga Indigenous Sport Education Project: A Presentation of Qualitative Data on the Implementation Process to the End of 2001", was also produced by Goddard and Anderson at Simpson Norris International for The Smith Family in September 2002 to record impressions and stories of the stakeholders involved. It compiled data from interviews with key stakeholder representatives who were engaged in all or part of the overall development and implementation of the Project from 1997 to the end of 2001.

Simpson Norris International reported on a further evaluation they had carried out for The Smith Family in February 2003, "Second Evaluation Report -- Swan Nyungar (Balga) Indigenous Sport Education Project: Walking a fine line". Responsibility for the evaluation of the project during 2003 has been taken on by William Loudon and Matthew Marsh at the Institute for the Service Professions Edith Cowan University. Their first progress report, "Evaluation of the Swan Nyungar Education Project (SNSEP)", was completed mid way through the second year of the program. It provides a summary of tasks agreed in the project contract and progress against those tasks: results from standardised testing in literacy and numeracy; data from interviews with the management group; a summary of focus groups and individual interviews with SNSEP teachers; and baseline interviews with all participating students.

³ While the distinction between program and non-program staff throughout the paper is a convenient short-hand way of speaking, it actually oversimplifies the situation at Balga Senior High. The school is home to a number of specialised programs of which SNSEP is but one. Some of the others include the Balga Youth Program for the severely alienated, the Child Care Centre for adolescent mums completing their HSC, the Aspirations bridging course, and Traineeships – jobs for life.

analysis of the responses to the interview questions confirms that some of the key principles identified in the design stage of the program are contributing to better educational outcomes for the students. However, the interviews also revealed broader challenges at the systems level of ensuring that a specialist program also has the capacity to facilitate mainstreaming into the entire school population.

Challenges at a systems level – educational and administrative

This section draws heavily on the evaluation report of the first full year of SNSEP throughout 2002 (Goddard, Anderson, Bruce, 2003). It presents SNSEP as a case study in facilitating culturally sensitive social inclusion of Aboriginal students and their families in an educational and social context that has not previously developed a capacity to meet the learning needs of Indigenous students. The evaluation suggests that the continuing viability and success of the program depend on a stronger incorporation of the students' families, carers, and culture, as well as a corresponding adjustment socially and administratively within the school to ensure a more culturally inclusive context.

The continuing challenge is to ensure that SNSEP provides for the specialised needs of the indigenous students taking part in it, while simultaneously providing incremental opportunities for mainstreaming into the broader school community. In retrospect, it can be said that the four major adjustments made during 2002 – collapsing the timetable, curricular adjustments, pedagogical adjustments, and the appointment of a project manager -- were effectively directed primarily at the first of those two major objectives.

Collapsing the timetable

The major change was to remove the Project and the students from the structured timetable that operated for all other Year 8 students. This meant limiting the number of teachers directly involved with the students on the Project and also limiting the need for students to move to a large number of classrooms around the school. The main reason for the change was to allow for a greater degree of flexibility that the Project needed to respond more effectively to the students. A further reason was to reduce the confusion experienced by the Aboriginal students in having the full complement of teachers and in having to move to different classrooms throughout the day.

Immediately after the change the students became more settled, better at self-management and the relation between teachers and students improved markedly. In addition, the teaching program is now more relevant to students' learning needs because the more flexible timetable means, for example, that a teacher taking English who would like the lesson extended can ask the next teacher to carry on with it. As one of the Project staff has noted: everything has improved since collapsing the timetable – the kids, learning outcomes, teacher satisfaction.

The major issue at the time of the writing of the evaluation was operational resistance from school staff not directly involved with the project. An unanticipated down side of collapsing the timetable was that it led to the perception among some members of the school community that the program was operating 'in' the school but not really as 'part of' the broader school community. Inasmuch as inclusion of the program into the mainstream of school activities is a long-term goal, this initial perception of a program apart from the main game was unfortunate and generated related problems that could obstruct greater inclusion if not addressed.

Adjustments to the curriculum

The major adjustments were:

- A thematic approach focusing on Nyungar culture
- Development of a curriculum overview outlining themes to direct the learning
- The engagement of Nyungar elders to undertake some of the classes
- Focusing on theatre, music and art using specialist Nyungar groups
- Integration of content across learning areas
- A daily fitness session.

Changes to the timetable and curriculum were instrumental in facilitating improvement for the students in academic achievement, cultural learning, personal fitness, general behaviour, self-management and football skills. One teacher noted that the adjustments allowed the borders between subjects to become porous with greater flexibility for cross curricular connections.

However, when these features came up against the curricular structure for most of the school non-Project staff had become either uncomfortable or threatened by the implications that the changes could have for the entire school. Some deeper issues here included moving from a discipline based approach to teaching to a more integrated problem solving focus that crossed disciplinary lines. The need for different teaching styles that such a shift brought on was threatening to non-program staff. If the changes had brought about better outcomes for Aboriginal students, surely it wouldn't be too long before questions would be raised about the potential for such changes to bring about better outcomes for the rest of the student population.

The down side to changes to the curriculum was a fairly high degree of political and academic resistance. While they were proving to be good for the students, they were also uncomfortable and threatening for many of the non-program staff. The cumulative effect of the resistance brought on a potential stumbling block to further inclusion of the project in the broader school community unless it could be effectively addressed.

Pedagogical adjustments

There were a number of major changes to the pedagogy understood simply as the method or methods used to engage students in learning. The main reason for the changes, in the view of those involved in the Project, was the empathy and understanding of a few staff members who were totally committed to the boys and the Project. The commitment involved a belief that to continue with a traditional teaching methods would alienate the boys from, rather than attract them to, learning in the context of the Project.

The first change was the introduction of a middle schooling pedagogy in which the boys were taught by and associated with only one team of teachers recruited for the Project. In addition, they did not change rooms as much as the other students and had the teachers come to their room rather than their moving back and forth between a variety of rooms. The boys also started undertaking a number of activities in the community. Gradually more and more education began taking place outside the four walls of the classroom.

The students are now much more willing to have a go at tasks they would previously have considered too hard. They have also become engaged in a variety of different activities in which integrated tasks were set employing multiple intelligences – analytical, emotional, psychological. In addition, students were given more leeway to set the learning agenda. Overall, they are much more motivated about coming to school, connecting with each other and their culture.⁴

⁴ See Ian Watson & Gillian Considine "Attitudes towards school and learning among students from low-income households" in *Barriers to Participation: Financial Educational and Technological*. The research shows how 'attitude' to learning is better for *Learning for Life* (LFL) students and a comparable LSAY cohort. In both cases, it appears

As with the curricular changes, the adjustment to teaching methods was also experienced as a major threat by those not ready for the implications of such a move for the entire staff. Another major challenge which this adjustment brought up for the school community was the potential value of more links with the local community in accessing complementary learning contexts for the students.

Project management

The first evaluation consistently emphasised that there is a tendency for projects focussed on indigenous peoples to start from or rapidly revert to non-Indigenous strategies and structures – the standard management and operational paradigms of the western world. What was especially needed was a person who could meet the needs of both worlds and ensure that neither was alienated from or dominated by the management practices of the other.

When such a person was not forthcoming, a management group was set up. This was done to ensure that a range of skills needed for overall management of a very complex project were available, as well as to avert the problem of any one stakeholder taking control of the project.⁵ This decision was largely in response to a fear expressed by Indigenous peoples during the Feasibility Study about non-Indigenous peoples *doing things to us or for us*.

While the decision addressed the fears of the Indigenous people who were consulted, it created significant issues for other stakeholders because of a lack of ‘final authority’ and clarity in roles, responsibilities and accountability. Recurrent problems with the management group not operating effectively made it obvious that a project manager would have to be taken on and given the ‘final say’. The challenge faced in such a role was summed up in the phrase “walking a fine line between cultures”.

A number of improvements have come about since a project manager has been recruited. Meetings of the Project staff are held more frequently and communication among the staff has improved markedly. The respective roles and responsibilities of all of the partners have been clarified. In addition, key decisions are being made and carried out. The general consensus among those involved in the Project is that the introduction of a project manager has helped to consolidate resources and ensure continuing momentum.

However, the challenge for effective project management in years 10, 11, and 12 of the Project will be to ensure broader acceptance and take up by the wider staff and student population, along with addressing the more immediate goals of the program focusing on improved outcomes for the students. Indeed, effective project management in conjunction with general school administration could turn resistance to changes in the curriculum and pedagogy into pluses for enhanced student outcomes throughout the school.

The school's ownership of the project – cultural obstacles and challenges

A number of areas indicate that the challenge of successfully ‘including’ an indigenous culture of learning in a non-indigenous context entails a number of

that the awareness and presence of support enhances the ability of otherwise disadvantaged students to frame their learning experiences more positively.

⁵ The rationale for this move is developed further in Goddard, D., Anderson, R. McGuire, J. and McGuire, O. Simpson Norris International (1999). *Final report: Improved Aboriginal educational attainment in education through sport*. Perth: Balga Senior High School and Department of Education (WA). The reasons for the subsequent appointment of a project manager are in Goddard, Anderson, Bruce (2003): 30-33.

obstacles to be overcome. In respect of those issues already mentioned, the following points were cited for monitoring and further work during 2003.

More consistent messages among SNSEP staff and between SNSEP and non-SNSEP staff

A critical challenge noted in the review is that messages reflecting an accurate understanding of SNSEP are still not being communicated and received by SNSEP and non-SNSEP staff with enough consistency. So, while the Project has a clearly defined goal, it has not been grasped evenly within and between Project and non-Project staff. There is a lingering sense that individual staff, both Project and non-Project, have individual goals not quite synchronised with the Project goal. Hence, the degree of support from and ownership by the entire school, is not yet as consistent, strong or obvious throughout the school as it could be. *Framing messages with greater consistency and developing a broader shared understanding of the Project goal is a matter requiring serious attention.* A better sense of “team” and an effective method of team communication still need to be generated, both within the Project Team and between the Project Team and the rest of the school staff.

A number of related challenges cluster around the school’s need for more consistent messages internally and externally. For example, there is *an on-going struggle to develop a curriculum that meets the outcomes set by the Education Department while achieving a Project identity and integrity that meets the needs of the clients.* From the schools’ perspective, there are two main problems in “bringing staff together” around the Project. The first is the substantial time and effort required from Project staff to operate effectively. They do not need to be bumping into persistent misunderstandings within the school in order to create the sort of environment that is needed for the students. The second is a longer-term issue for the whole school – the likelihood that somewhere in the vicinity of 200 students, possibly over 50 per cent of the school population, will be Indigenous by the year 2006. This begs a range of questions for the whole school to come to terms with.

Better communication across a variety of program staff

There is also a pressing need to facilitate regular and consistent communication among all stakeholders in all of the sub-schools that comprise the Balga community. A clearer understanding of the roles, responsibilities and accountability, that also includes parents and carers and mainstream staff is needed if further progress is to be made. In addition, there is also a need for everyone to be aware of the impact of politics, whether black, white, school, the education system, individuals and their families and stakeholders.

Engaging families and communities more broadly

In pointing to the need for greater engagement of and participation by Indigenous parents and carers in the Project, it must be acknowledged that “community participation” even among non-Indigenous people in government schools is often extremely limited. Nonetheless, there is a need to keep trying and to develop new and different strategies to engage parents and carers more effectively. For example, instead of having “parent meetings” at school to which all parents and carers are expected to attend, there could be small “family” meetings held in homes or other venues in suburbs close to those homes. While there are issues and problems of considerable importance that mitigate against many Indigenous parents and carers becoming engaged, if the Project is to effectively cut some “welfare chains” that hinder the development of Indigenous peoples, then it must find ways to do so.

Providing opportunities for tutoring and mentoring outside of school hours

The review also strongly suggested the need to look at strategies to support students outside of the school hours through tutoring and mentoring. The ability of Project staff to repeat their efforts in 2003 in addressing additional educational needs will be hindered by a three-fold increase in student numbers if not matched by a corresponding increase in staff numbers. The 2002 evaluation recommended that more SNSEP staff will have to be hired to accommodate the shift in student demographics.⁶ In addition, non-SNSEP staff will also need the commitment and energy to respond collaboratively to the diverse range of educational needs of the students in the Project.

Cultural differences in setting priorities, family structures, and approaches to time

Cultural flash points described in the evaluation indicate how differently indigenous and non-indigenous Australians “go about doing things”. In the first instance, the process for setting priorities is very different. In general, non-Indigenous Australians start with an “outcome-orientation” when taking on a challenge. However, it is more common in Indigenous culture to start with the development of relationships. Further, for Indigenous Australians, transience is a fact of life and often has to be a priority. People move for a range of reasons like family or cultural obligations to avoid conflict or for positive or negative personal related issues.

Indigenous and non-indigenous cultures have largely different ways of rearing children. Indigenous people tend to situate child rearing in an extended family context, with family members having different roles and responsibilities at different times in a child’s growth and development. In contrast, non-Indigenous Australians are more comfortable with nuclear type families in which parents have predominant, if not total, responsibility for their children.

In non-Indigenous society, “the clock” is important – things are done at precise times according to planned schedules. In Indigenous society, *things get done when they get done* and will take *as long as they take*. The school organisational structure is an example of the non-Indigenous mode of operation – an established, predictable set of events occurring weekly and repeated by the same people at the same time of each day in each week. Regularity is the cornerstone of educational administration, and given the requirements of the duty of care legislation and an ordered process of learning, is clearly important. The rhythm of Indigenous regularity, however, is a very different beat from that to which schools dance.

A very good example of the “different rhythms” was reflected in the issues encountered in the selection process in 2002. One of the Indigenous Project staff captured the difference in the following account.

The school expects me to get out there, talk to parents, get them to sign the forms, bring them back, get the kids to the selection venue. But it's not like that out there. The first review recommended starting the selection process in Term One next year and having it all done by the end of Term Two. Even if we did that, I would still be running around in Term Four visiting people and getting forms signed or reminding those who are still around what they signed in Term Two because they will have forgotten. Some of those will have changed their minds and some of them will have shifted. Some of the kids won't be with their parents/carers. They'll be somewhere else. There is no harm in starting in Term One to promote things and get information about who is interested and why, and getting forms signed, as long as people understand it won't make a lot of difference in the end.

⁶In fact, the decision has been taken in 2003 to take on eight more staff for SNSEP.

As a second example of the “different rhythms”, some students in the Project in 2002 were in families where the support of children, their aspirations, parental expectations and “discipline” ensured attendance at school was maximal and most requirements of the educational system were met. Some students, however, were from families where dysfunction was either endemic or occurred without notice. The sudden arrival of “dysfunction” can place enormous strain on the Project staff and there are limits to what they can do to support either the family or the student.

As the year-end evaluation showed, most people interviewed accept the need for order and regularity. Efforts are being and will continue to be made to increase order and regularity in the organisational and curriculum structure of the Project and the relationships between the Project Staff, between Project and non-Project staff and between the school and Indigenous families. However, the regularity and order required and desired by both societies will take time to achieve and what is ultimately achieved may still be different from what is expected either by the educational system or the Indigenous peoples.

Additional administrative and cultural issues

Regulatory responsibilities and acceptable adjustments within that context

For all the efforts to establish an effective specialised program and a mode of governance that provided a voice for all stakeholders,⁷ when the “rubber hit the road”, Balga Senior High School was and is the entity responsible and accountable for the education of Indigenous students. Indeed, by law, the school has a care of duty towards and is responsible and accountable for the educational wellbeing of *all* students. It also has finite resources and there are limits on its capacity for flexibility. It can make exceptions but those exceptions must be affordable, justifiable and within the skills and capabilities of staff to manage.

An initial lack of ‘difference’ and ‘resistance to change

While the Project set out to educate Indigenous students in ways that were “different” on the basis that past efforts in secondary schools to assist them have been largely unsuccessful, the early months of the Project demonstrated a lack of “difference”. The thinking that influenced the shape of the Project often appeared to be swayed by educators steeped in the traditional practices of secondary schooling or teaching, particularly in the areas of curriculum, pedagogy and behaviour management and discipline. For all the processes in place to “do things differently”, the Year 8 class of boys were made to fit the traditional timetable.

In addition, there is a view among SNSEP staff that many non-SNSEP staff saw the Project as an adjunct within the schema of “the real work” of Balga Senior High. The “real work”, for all the differences that had been created by focussing on the Vocational Education and Training (VET) curriculum and not on the Tertiary Entrance (TEE) curriculum, was still to focus on the general population of students. The majority of the student population was viewed culturally as white English speaking Australians.⁸ The general curriculum, pedagogy and behaviour management

⁷ The stakeholders include DEST, the WA Department of Education and Training and Aboriginal Education, The Smith Family, the SWAN Department of Employment Opportunity, ASSPA, ISIEP, ATAS, VEGAS, and Gundi Propriety Limited. In addition, there are a number of sponsors: The Smith Family, Perilya, Newmont, North City Holden, and AFL Sports Ready.

⁸ Balga Senior High School is highly cosmopolitan. There were reported to be approximately 70 different ethnic groups represented in the school in the late 1990s. Data from the Education Department in terms of standardised testing (see for example, *Monitoring Standards in Education*, 1993) show that the highest achievers in Western Australia were “native” English speaking students, about 85 per cent of the student population. The next highest achievers are generally students of non-English background students, and, as the lowest achievers by a long way, Indigenous students.

processes were all designed to “fit” the needs of this majority. SNSEP staff members, as data in the report have shown, often saw that sort of “design and delivery” as “the school” not supporting the Project and inhibiting its development. It is also understandable why many non-Project staff saw their “resistance” as providing “solutions” to bring about a greater sense of order, regularity, “responsible” management and “fairness” in the overall operations of the school. The conflicting views have been part of the context of the Project implementation and have made the implementation a very complex process.

A context for further development and five continuing challenges for the way forward

A sense of order and regularity is beginning to emerge in SNSEP because a number of principles have guided the project’s development in a context of different cultures with different ‘ways of doing things’ and ‘different priorities’. They include acceptance and acknowledgment by all stakeholders that the ‘process’ takes time, patience, respectful understanding of differences, space to evolve and resources for positive development to happen. To the extent that the principles continue to be accepted the partnership among all stakeholders can become stronger, and SNSEP can operate in the interests of both academic achievement and cultural development for Indigenous peoples.

However, continuing administrative and cultural challenges that could jeopardise a broader potential outcome for the entire school -- enhanced social inclusion -- have surfaced especially in five areas: pedagogy; curriculum design; engagement of families and elders; the relation between the program and non-program staff; and administrative flexibility. Expectations on both sides of what the other should or could do clash with the desire and abilities of the other group to want or to be able to meet these expectations. What follows is an overview of how the five challenges have begun to be addressed since the beginning of the 2003 school year, along with estimates of progress thus far. The overview has been culled from a series of interviews with key Project and non-project staff at Balga Senior High.⁹

How five ongoing challenges highlighted in the 2002 evaluation are Being Addressed -- a summary of responses to questions placed to key staff

What teaching methods (pedagogy) have been adjusted, added or removed from SNSEP since the changes cited in the final evaluation report for 2002?

With the introduction of 50 new PC’s the program has been made as digital as possible. The visual components of computers are particularly appealing to Aboriginal students. Overall, teaching methods have become more visual, practical and situated in real life contexts. There are more real world tasks across disciplines and more group work. Many of the open-ended tasks start with meaningful goal setting and a greater emphasis on outcomes. The introduction of Aboriginal liaison officers to the program has contributed to a more hands on approach to and closer linkages with Nyungar culture. Sport is being applied more broadly to develop a range of life skills as well as to ‘sow the seeds of aspiration’. Inappropriate – discipline based – teaching methods have been dropped. It is hoped that the increased numbers of staff that have been employed to accommodate

⁹ A total of eight staff were contacted. From them seven were interviewed and one provided comments but declined to be interviewed. Those who were interviewed included the Principal and Deputy Principal of Balga Senior High; the Deputy Principal Boys and Deputy Principal girls within the SNSEP Project; the Aboriginal Support Officer and Assistant to the Deputy Principal SNSEP girls; a SNSEP teacher for girls; and a Steering Committee Member also working as a Strategic Support Officer reporting to the school Principal. The Aboriginal Support Officer and Assistant to the Deputy Principal SNSEP boys offered comments on the Project but declined to be interviewed.

the three-fold increase in student numbers will facilitate the introduction of an even greater range of teaching methods.

Have the pedagogical changes introduced as part of SNSEP impacted on the range of teaching methods employed at Balga for the rest of the student population?

Teaching methods have also become more digital across the school. In addition, there has been some progress in working across discipline areas. However, the emphasis in SNSEP of starting with and building a trusting relationship with the kids continues to be a differentiating factor in teaching methods across the school. The timetable for the rest of the school is still fairly rigid in comparison with the SNSEP timetable. Probably the main impact on teaching methods as a result of SNSEP is a stronger recognition of the importance of relating teaching methods to culture. Teachers in all six of Balga's sub schools are dealing with at risk students who could benefit from teaching methods that incorporate their life experiences more closely with their studies. The student centred focus of SNSEP and the emphasis on employability could easily benefit the rest of the student body since all of the students come from a similar demographic.

What adjustments to the curriculum have been refined, added or removed from SNSEP since the changes cited in the final evaluation report for 2002?

In general, the integration of tasks and processes into 'curricular content' has improved significantly. There is also broader acceptance of the need for curricular developments in SNSEP to be ongoing and introduced as needed, as well as a greater consistency in acknowledging Nyungar culture in all eight learning areas of the curriculum. The Nyungar culture component of the curriculum is also more LOTE oriented. With the introduction of the girls' cohort, further gender based cultural issues have had to be introduced. Problems in Term One with out sourcing the development of the Nyungar component of the curriculum to a local TAFE have been addressed by bringing a specialist onto the SNSEP staff to carry out the task. There is a better understanding of the importance of pastoral care requirements across the curriculum.

Have the adjustments to the curriculum for SNSEP had a broader impact on the curricular design employed at Balga for the rest of the student population?

The year 9 mainstream team have drawn up an integrated task grid on teenage issues. In addition, there is a growing interest across the school in SNSEP 'curricular innovations'. The middle schooling thematic approach was a winner that all of the sub schools now recognise as desirable for year 8 students. However, there is still a strong perception that SNSEP's approach to the curriculum is not reflected in the rest of the school. The whole school is still struggling with the concept of curriculum, especially in relation to content and quality control. Unfortunately, some of the learning area coordinators are still not adequately aware of what is happening in SNSEP.

Have the families of SNSEP students, as well as elders, become more involved in the project and, if yes, how? If no, why not?

There has been a marked increase in family involvement via attendance at the sporting events. It is still a challenge, however, to involve families and elders in other learning areas of the curriculum. There is also scope and opportunity for greater parent and elder involvement in decision making processes. While there is a general perception that SNSEP is still struggling with parental and community involvement, family and community endorsement became obvious when the enrolment increased three-fold at the

beginning of the second year. A dedicated staff person who has been taken on to facilitate contact with the families has already made a noticeable difference. A parent liaison group has been formed, despite some of the parents finding the administrative ethos of the school intimidating. Work still needs to be done on rendering the school more Aboriginal friendly. Messages and communication about the program to the parents is largely ineffective unless it is face to face. The latter is difficult because of the distances between many of the families' homes and the school. In some instances tensions and conflicts between extended families make it very difficult to deal with some of the families, especially when there are problems at home impacting on student performance. Some SNSEP teachers, who have not worked with indigenous communities before, do not know how to engage the families in a culturally appropriate way. Since most SNSEP families are not local, it is difficult for many of them to feel a part of the Balga community and school.

Has family involvement in SNSEP been reflected in family and community engagement for other sections of the school population?

There has been considerably more contact with families on the road as a result of communicating the availability of LFL scholarships. The principal has brought different sections of the community together in a way that has established a platform for facilitating greater family and community involvement for the entire school. However, it is important to recall that SNSEP has not been in existence long enough to have had a more broad impact on the way the rest of the school engages families. It is hoped that as it enters its main streaming phase, SNSEP will facilitate the engagement of families of non-indigenous students in aspects of the program that could be applied in the other sub-schools. Unfortunately, Aboriginal representatives have not taken up invitations to sit on a school wide parent representative group.

Have Initiatives been taken to improve relationships between program and non-program staff?

Significant improvements in more positive attitudes toward SNSEP by non-SNSEP staff have developed in comparison with the first year of the program. A large harmony day was held in March at which all 40 cultures represented in school were gathered in a meeting designed to promote greater cross cultural awareness. Nonetheless, perceptions that impede further ownership by the whole school still persist. Some non-program staff don't appear to appreciate the amount of hard work that it takes to introduce a new program, as well as the work that has to be done in relation to indigenous students. Some of the senior staff were originally raising obstructionist questions and putting up blockages to forward movement. Some non-program staff feel threatened by the implications that SNSEP innovations might have on their areas of responsibility and their own development personally and professionally. The recruitment of 8 more SNSEP staff with the consequence that 8 of the general staff will have to move out will provide a major challenge to both SNSEP and non-SNSEP staff.

In relation to communication between program and non-program staff, it is not always clear where degrees of responsibility for improved communication lie. Lack of communication internally hinders the development of more realistic attitudes while good communication breaks down stereotypes and strengthens positive attitudes. Information about the program needs to be communicated more regularly and consistently. SNSEP staff are making more of an effort to go to the staff tea room to mingle more broadly to facilitate better communication. However, some SNSEP staff do not think that enough is being done to improve relations and that further initiatives are needed urgently.

Is there a broader ownership of SNSEP by the entire school community? If yes, why? If no, why not?

As the program grows more non-SNSEP staff are interested and want to become involved. Teachers who want to be on the program suggests that more non-SNSEP staff are seeing the educational benefits of the program even for non-SNSEP students. On a culture change scale of 1 to 5 the whole school is at about 2 to 3. P and C are now asking for SNSEP to speak at P and C meetings. However, one of the 'big issues' yet to be overcome in the short term is the general level of support, commitment and understanding from the rest of the sub schools. Outside the school, there are a number of influences that exacerbate the development of better indigenous non-indigenous relations in the school. For example, the Premier is threatening a curfew, that if implemented, would hinder Aboriginal participation in activities in the evening that are specifically designed as after school extensions of SNSEP. Such attitudes in the broader community tend to reinforce unfair biases in the school. Resistance to change continues on philosophical, educational and cultural levels and some non-SNSEP staff still question a distinct program for Aboriginal students. Despite evidence that SNSEP is working some of the staff find it difficult to affirm and recommend it.

While there are genuine efforts at the beginning of each school year to acquaint staff and students with each of the sub school programs, it is not long afterwards that everyone goes into survival mode in their own areas. SNSEP staff do not have time to mingle with other staff and vice versa. Many of the SNSEP staff do not see the broader school picture and therefore do not easily understand why more dedicated staff are not available. However, staff from all of the sub schools have a tendency to fixate on their own turf and not fully appreciate the resource constraints on the whole school. One of the results of this tendency is that Information about SNSEP is not getting across to the rest of the school and many of the SNSEP staff feel alienated from the rest of the school. Some non-SNSEP staff have trouble dealing with Aboriginal children. Indeed, some staff in all of the sub-schools look at all students without sufficient respect for differences and impose a one-size fits all approach across the board.

Has administrative flexibility at Balga in relation to SNSEP improved since the program's first year of operation?

During the first year the senior administrators were divided in their support for adjustments that could be made in reference to SNSEP. They have been much more supportive during the second year. Criticisms have been taken seriously with the result that more teachers are being taken on to account for the needs of a growing student population. A plan for the incremental integration of SNSEP students into the wider student body has also been drawn up. However, flexibility is still pretty 'spotty'. A very serious challenge will be faced with the year 10, 11, and 12 students because their broader integration will require further involvement from non-SNSEP staff, and the latter's availability will depend on a capacity to deal with more administrative flexibility across the school. The collapsed timetable is 'beastly difficult' to coordinate with teachers who are on the general timetable. However, the general timetable is essential to provide opportunities that otherwise simply are not available for SNSEP students.

At present, there is more flexibility for SNSEP than for the rest of the school. However, the present degree of administrative flexibility in all of the sub schools is so great that they could become autonomous if they were not monitored carefully. Assessments of present degrees of administrative flexibility become skewed when staff concentrate on immediate problems to the extent of losing sight of the bigger picture and the need for forward thinking. The biggest administrative challenge for SNSEP is to develop a more effective selection process and set of criteria. Kids who are neither ready nor suited for

SNSEP can cause significant disruption to the program, as well as be set up for another experience of failure and shame.

Have the administrative challenges in relation to SNSEP had a flow on effect for greater administrative flexibility throughout the school?

There is greater administrative flexibility in relation to attitudes and procedures throughout the school and appropriate administrative adjustments have been made throughout Balga in relation to SNSEP. For example, the general timetable is progressively becoming more flexible. This will be an extremely important factor in facilitating the incremental main streaming, which is a projected goal for Year 10, 11, and 12 SNSEP students. Once non-program staff begins to realise that SNSEP is aiming at enhanced student performance, and not a watering down of present practices, they become more open to how administrative flexibility for SNSEP could benefit other programs. Unfortunately, there are more limits to administrative flexibility in the public system than in the private system. More 'give and take' is needed from the education department. There is a real need for a 'systems' change.

It is likely that some of the communication and resource allocation problems will lessen as more non SNSEP staff become involved with SNSEP students when SNSEP students start integrating more broadly with the rest of the school population. The administrative challenge of beginning the integration of SNSEP students in year 10 will be largely dependent on other staff being willing to work with the program. Some of the main stream students see the advantage for themselves. Solutions from a task perspective are simple. The resistance is political and complements the otherwise simple tasks. People will have to be sensitive to the fact that teachers can only take on those challenges that they are prepared for according to their personal and professional development.

Conclusion: an assessment of progress and recommendations for sustaining momentum toward greater social inclusion

Assessment of Progress

The data collected in the interviews reflect serious efforts that have been taken to ensure that problems encountered in the first full year of the Project's operation do not place either positive outcomes for the students or ownership by and inclusion in the total school community at risk. In relation to the interrelated issues of teaching methods and curriculum development, the challenges encountered are as much reflective of tensions between an older discipline based approach to content and teaching and a student focused approach to problem solving as they are of tensions between indigenous and non-indigenous cultures. The former differences effectively reflect clashes in 'educational cultures'. The latter are more broadly based and more deeply embedded in communication styles, approaches to families and child rearing, and patterns of authority and administration. Overall, as SNSEP became more digital and emphasised real world tasks across disciplines with strong links to Nyungar culture, all of Balga also became more digital and more teachers came to appreciate the value of problem based learning that integrated curricular content more closely with students' lives.

There have been two major advances in how SNSEP engages families of the students. During the second year of the program there has been a marked increase in family attendance at the SNSEP sporting events. In addition, the three-fold increase in student enrolment during the second year can also be seen as a proxy indicator of family involvement with the students in the contexts of their homes. If the families did not think that the program was having a good impact on the kids they would have walked away

from it. The positive assessment has been shared with other families who, in turn, have registered affirmation and trust in the program by enrolling their sons and daughters. Program organisers now need to focus on engaging families more broadly in two areas of school activity: the learning areas of the curriculum and the parent representative group. Since all of the learning areas are incorporating aspects of student life and Nyungar culture, parental involvement will value add to the process. Perhaps, the more difficult challenge is the hoped for involvement of Aboriginal parents on the parent representative group. A number of the parents have noted how the school environment is not particularly 'Aboriginal friendly'. In addition, the evaluation has shown that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents select priorities and rank values differently. There is probably an intuitive awareness that in a forum that addresses priorities and values the predominant culture will dominate. The further complicating factor of a long history of not particularly welcoming and embracing Aboriginal values and culture in the context of compulsory education probably reinforces the perception.

One of the most critical factors identified as complicating ongoing social inclusion of the SNSEP students and the values espoused in the program has been the relationship that either has or has not developed between SNSEP and non-SNSEP staff. Probably the most positive development since the first year of the program has been the improvement in attitudes toward SNSEP staff by non-SNSEP staff. Some of the senior non-SNSEP staff were quite resistant to the program and its implications for broader changes across the school. That resistance has largely been neutralised. It is still present in more subtle forms, but there also appears to be a greater willingness to stand back and say: "let's wait and see." However, internal communication between SNSEP and non-SNSEP staff still continues to be the single most pressing need for improvement. Both groups of school staff need to take greater responsibility for making themselves available for communication with each other. Also, information about the program needs to be communicated regularly and consistently. A factor that impacts on all of the sub schools at Balga is that staff in each sub-school can become so intensely focussed on their own areas of specialised responsibility that they lose sight of and sympathy for the bigger picture and forward thinking. Unless all sub-school staff are able to maintain a focus simultaneously on both micro and macro issues, they may become isolated and cut themselves off from valuable resources in the rest of the school.

Since the first year of the program, the flexibility of administrative procedures has improved. There has also been a greater appreciation for the complexities involved in implementing both the short-term and long-term objectives of SNSEP. In the short term, the demand for flexibility is very intense in order to accommodate the induction of students into the program. In the long term there has to be broader collaboration, which also entails considerable degrees of flexibility, to accommodate the incremental inclusion of the SNSEP students with the rest of the student population. So, for example, more people can now understand the rationale behind 'collapsing the timetable' for the year 8 and 9 SNSEP students to ensure that specialised learning needs are met. However, a much smaller number have come to terms with the implications yet to be operationalised across the school to accommodate the main streaming of the SNEP students in years 10, 11, and 12 so that they can progressively benefit from the school resources beyond those offered within the context of SNSEP.

Recommendations for Enhancing the Social Inclusion of SNSEP in Balga Senior High

The first and most important recommendation is for a more inclusive and consistent process for cross program communication and management. Throughout the evaluation of the first year of the program and in all of the interviews conducted mid way through the second year better communication and information flows between SNSEP and the rest of the sub-schools within the Balga Senior High Community were cited as a problem. As the number of students participating in SNSEP increases and eventually becomes the largest segment of the overall student population, the rest of the school will inevitably

become aware of the program and purpose. In the meantime, however, better internal communication is needed across programs to break down stereotypes and strengthen positive attitudes to ensure that Balga is inclusive and representative of a diversity of cultures and learning needs.

A second recommendation is the further development of an overarching educational strategy for the entire school that better highlights the shared and similar educational goals among all of the sub-schools. All of the sub-schools enrol at risk students. All of the sub-schools require a degree of work on the part of their respective staff that is extremely labour intensive. In this context, there is a tendency for most of the staff to become so focussed on their specific responsibilities to the detriment of their connections and communication with other program staff. While part of this difficulty has already been alluded to in the previous recommendation for more consistent information and communication about SNSEP, the larger system issue within Balga, which affects all of the sub-schools, is how better to leverage resources across the school for enhanced impact in all of the programs.

A third recommendation is for enhanced connections with family and community resources outside of the school setting and school hours. This recommendation reflects a challenge that many schools, not simply Balga senior high, face in learning how to tap into and involve community and family resources to support and complement school staff in responding to a range of student needs that are not in the first instance educational. The SNSEP staff all commented on how the program drained their energy. The excitement and challenge of implementing such a worthwhile program is helping most of them compensate for the incredibly big demands on their time and energy. However, a key element in ensuring sustainability of the project will be the involvement of families and the community in ways that are presently not taking place.

Finally, the decision to take on a dedicated project manager at the beginning of 2003 needs to be re-affirmed and continued throughout the remaining three and one half years of the Project. The management challenges of communication and information flow, linkages with an overarching educational strategy throughout the school, and strong connections with families and the indigenous community are all too vital to the continuing success of the program to be left to distinct streams of management that may or may not come together. While the retention of a dedicated project manager will not guarantee both the short and long-term success of the Project, two factors in particular argue in its favour. During the first year of the Project key components of the initiative came very close to imploding. While a number of factors can be appealed to for explanations, including the need not to be perceived as engaging a form of management that the indigenous stakeholders might have experienced as an imposition, the lack of decisive project management was gradually acknowledged as one of them. The momentum achieved during the first half of the second year can also be attributed to a number of factors. However, it is quite clear that the introduction of a dedicated project manager has been one of the key factors in accelerating positive momentum, both on the level of student outcomes and systems adjustment. In order to ensure the consolidation of this momentum, dedicated project management at this stage in the Project's implementation continues to be a critical element in achieving the hoped for outcomes.

APPENDIX ONE

Interview questions for key staff at Balga

1. What teaching methods (pedagogy) have been adjusted, added or removed from SNSEP since the changes cited in the final evaluation report for 2002?
2. Have the pedagogical changes introduced as part of SNSEP impacted on the range of teaching methods employed at Balga for the rest of the student population?
3. What adjustments to the curriculum have been refined, added or removed from SNSEP since the changes cited in the final evaluation report for 2002?
4. Have the adjustments to the curriculum for SNSEP had a broader impact on the curricular design employed at Balga for the rest of the student population?
5. Have the families of SNSEP students and elders become more involved in the project and, if yes, how? If no, why not?
6. Has family involvement in SNSEP been reflected in family and community engagement for other sections of the student population?
7. Have initiatives been taken to improve relationships between program and non-program staff?
8. Is there a broader ownership of SNSEP by the entire school community? If yes, why? If no, why not?
9. Has administrative flexibility at Balga in relation to SNSEP improved since the program's first year of operation?
10. Have the administrative challenges in relation to SNSEP had a flow on effect for greater administrative flexibility throughout the school?

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