Leading Indigenous Literacy – Pilot Project

Catholic Education (Diocese of Townsville)

Research Evaluation Report – 2009
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1. <u>PROJECT OUTLINE</u>

The proposed pilot is designed to support individualised literacy and language learning for the Indigenous students in P-7 at St Michael's and Years 8-9 at Abergowrie who currently are among the well-documented Indigenous students who fail to achieve national and international literacy benchmarks.

This project includes teachers, Indigenous Education Workers, education support staff, parents and community in an attempt to develop a sustained improvement in students' literacy and language development. By integrating the use of existing data collection (Townsville Catholic Education Data Jug), monitoring (Indigenous Bandscales) and First Steps strategy bank (Reading, Writing, Oral Language) the project will individualise and fast-track literacy and language learning. This approach will be supported by intensive professional development and training for teachers, Indigenous Education Workers, allied staff, parents and community.

The rationale for this project is based on the premise that accelerating achievement of COAG agreed targets for literacy requires an approach that targets the development of community capacity in Indigenous communities through whole school approaches to literacy and language learning.

This project is underpinned by the following principles:

Partnership between key stakeholders – e.g. schools, parents and communities; teachers, Indigenous Education workers and students; allied professionals (e.g. health workers), teachers and parents.

Respect for the diverse language and cultural contexts of the schools and their communities.

Training professional development and training opportunities need to be relevant, timely, supported and supportive.

Employment of culturally and academically qualified Indigenous people at all levels of Catholic education is essential to the creation of a shared, harmonious and dynamic education environment.

2. **<u>METHODOLOGY</u>**

The researchers (Sue McGinty and Leanne Dalley-Trim) from James Cook University (JCU) spent two days at St Michael's School, Palm Island. During this time they interviewed teachers and administration, teacher aides, and Indigenous education workers. A focus group was held for the teacher aides. The Interview Schedule is attached as Appendix A. This was modified for the Principal and the Deputy Principal and for the teacher aides. Each interview was arranged during school hours and took approximately 40 minutes. Each participant was asked to sign a Consent Form (Appendices B and C) and was given an Information Sheet (Appendix D).

Additionally, the researchers spent two days (and 1 night) at St Teresa's College, Abergowrie. Here, they interviewed Year 8 and Year 9 teachers as well as administration staff. The Interview Schedule is attached as Appendix E – and, as at St Michael's, this was modified for the interviews conducted with administrators. Each participant was again asked to sign a Consent Form (Appendices B and C) and was given an Information Sheet (Appendix D).

3. FINDINGS

3.1   ST MICHAEL'S SCHOOL, PALM ISLAND

3.1.1   TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

Individual interviews were conducted with the teachers and administrators at St Michael's School, Palm Island – including: the teachers of the Prep Year and Years 1, 2 and 3, and the Principal and Deputy Principal.

During the course of the interviews with these staff members, the following findings emerged.

Indigenous Bandscales Training and Implementation

Teachers generally felt that the training from Libby re: the Bandscales was very good. This occurred in Term 4, 2008 and again in Term 1, 2009. There have been 3 session altogether although not all teachers have attended all of them. It is early days yet and teachers are still collecting data. One administrator felt that "teachers were probably meant to be using the program more than what was actually happening." PD after school is not always the best time. Full days on student free days were cited as the best time for PD.

Teachers were collecting oral language samples from the students but are dependent on when the trainee teacher was present so they had uninterrupted time with the students. They also reported that they were collecting the samples during pupil free time. One teacher reported that the early years' bandscales were very useful as they were culturally appropriate. The distinction between home language and school language was still not that clear. We observed some teachers using cued articulation in the classrooms although this was not widespread. Most teachers thought it was good to have baseline data, as it was a good way of tracking and levelling students.
Some teachers have not completed the oral language sampling and this was due to time constraints. Others felt it fitted well with the Essential Learnings framework.

One teacher started this year and reported that she had little training so far. None of the teachers reported going beyond oral language sampling.

First Steps Training and Implementation

Most teachers reported having had some training in First Steps but only one teacher was actively using the strategies taught. One teacher made use of books as a means of exploring the 'recount genre'. Generally this area was understood less clearly than the Bandscales. One teacher used First Steps at another school and was very familiar with it. She was using the 100 Magic Words and THRASS programs. She felt much of the "First Steps was over the children's heads" and she had to teach them school behaviours as well. Most teachers felt they needed a lot more PD in this area.

Individualised Literacy and Language Learning Opportunities

Most teachers understood that the provision of individualised literacy and language learning opportunities is what they were working towards but all reported they are a long way from getting there. None had done individualised learning plans. Most thought this was the aim for 2010 once they had an opportunity to look at test results. Teachers reported they had IEPs for hearing impaired students. The teachers noted that because some students went to the mainland it was difficult to keep track of those who missed a lot of schooling. Some had two groups, those who came to school regularly and those who did not. It was easier to do this for students who attended regularly. The learning support teacher, Cathi, had done some individualised programs for her students. One teacher reported a number of activities she was doing – focusing on targeting home vs school language. The speech pathologist was very helpful in understanding these concepts.

Collaborative Work with Colleagues

There were mixed messages on the issue of professional collaboration. One teacher reported that there were cluster meetings every 2 weeks (i.e. P-3, and the 4-7 cluster). There have been a few activities where teachers have shared what they are doing with the others e.g. P-3 mixed groups, lolly safari, and at Easter and Xmas there were things that they did in common. They have talked about a TA day but this hasn't happened yet. The year 1 and Prep teacher sometimes work together. Cathi, in learning support, was acknowledged as being the person who did most of this work. Overall there appears to be little sharing in regard the literacy and language project and teachers said they could do more of this.

Whole School Approach to Literacy Learning

While one teacher said that literacy was always important at St Michael's, the principal reported that a whole school approach to literacy learning was on his agenda and that he would be doing it for 2010. He was looking at other school's plans and seeing what he thought would be good practice, e.g. Holy Spirit School. He was currently thinking through the process of developing a WSLP. At this stage we did not see a whole school literacy approach.

Have I (Staff Member) Learned More About Literacy Through this Project?

Yes – teachers reported they have learned more. Staff would like more sessions with Katie, the speech pathologist. Staff reported they had learned a lot about oral language through training. This was valuable. One teacher reported that she sometimes 'code switched' but also reported that she found it difficult to find the differences between home and school language. Some of the difficulties were "with students who only attended once a week".

Connections with Community

Most community connections were through the school newsletter. There was an Open Day (it was reported that not many parents attended), a 'Make and Take Day' at which parents came into the school and were able to do craft activities and take home the products, e.g. decorated Easter eggs, Easter bonnets. Mother's Day and Father's Day were also times when the school attempted to reach out to the community. Doris and Archie had major responsibility for school community liaison. They went with teachers at the end of each semester to deliver reports to the families. One teacher reported that it was difficult to change a culture of non-participation by parents. Volunteering was not a culture at St Michael's. The Principal reported that he was conducting a RADII survey of parents about how they could be more effective. This was incomplete at this time.

Suggestions/Comments from the Staff

- While most teachers could see the benefit of gathering data they felt it needed to be followed through. Teachers needed to see 'why' they were doing it. Some of the 'big picture issues' such as the federal funding for "Closing the Gap" probably needs to be explained in more detail.

- Libby's PD was valued. But we need to follow through and incorporate this in planning.
- We need to make short-term goals. We need a bit more direction from Libby.
- We need more sharing meetings. These help.
- There are a lot of interruptions in teaching and we need to minimise this.
- Bridget was seen as a wonderful resource, as she gave time to teachers to do the sampling needed for the program.
- I've got data, where to from here?
- We need longevity to make all this happen.
- We need more collaboration with our TA's.

Overall Suggestions from the Researchers

a. *Specific deadlines for data collection need to be set.*

Deadlines need to be set in relation to data collection and the teachers and administration informed of these. Monitoring of the process by Libby – and the timelines to be met – would enhance the timeliness of data collection. Appropriate resources (including non-contact time) should also be provided to teachers in order to meet the established timelines.

b. *Outline the end point so that teachers can see what they are aiming for.*

Teachers need to be further briefed about the project and its overall aims – i.e., what is the end point, what does it hope to achieve? So, too, they need to be further familiarised with their role in the project – particularly in relation to how to achieve the aims of it and what this means for them in practical terms.

c. *Get TA's further trained and get teachers to consciously make use of them. At this point it was interesting to note that teachers did not mention the role or value of TA's.*

TA's should receive further training – including training in Bandscales and Oral Language Sampling – so that they can be better used as a resource in the classroom and as a reference source for the classroom teacher.

d. *There needs to be further training on Indigenous Bandscales, Oral Language Sampling and First Steps and more sharing about what strategies are working for teachers.*

Teachers – like the TAs – need further training in the areas of Indigenous Bandscales, Oral Language Sampling and First Step strategies. So, too, this

training would be most effective if it were to be on going and sustained – not delivered as a 'one-off'. This training would also be most effective if framed within the guiding principles of the "Closing the Gap" initiative and by the aims of the "Leading Indigenous Literacy" project.

e. *There needs to be teacher release to complete the Oral Language Sampling, as it seems to be going quite slowly.*

Teacher release time is required in order to speed up the process of Oral Language Sampling – which is a reportedly time-consuming process. At present, teachers are reliant upon the availability of the teacher trainee.

f. *There needs to be a Whole School Literacy and Language Plan developed (this is planned for 2010).*

Given that the Principal is currently exploring possible models with a view to have a WSLLP in place in 2010, he should be supported in the development of this plan.

g. *Community liaison efforts need to be enhanced.*

At present, community liaison is happening – mostly by Doris and Archie – but not by the teachers. As such, plans should be put in place to involve teachers in community liaison activities.

Finally, at this stage it was too difficult to identify any 'best practice'.

3.1.2 TEACHER AIDES AND SUPPORT STAFF

Both focus group and individual interviews were conducted with the teacher aides/assistants and other support workers at St Michael's School, Palm Island

The following key themes emerged during the course of interviews and focus groups with the teacher aides and support staff.

Work Undertaken By Teacher Aides and Support Staff

The teacher aides/support staff spoke of carrying out a range of duties. While some teacher aides took on more responsibility than others, and the support staff undertook

duties specific to their particular role, the following duties are representative of the work that they spoke of doing:

- Reading with students – both one-on-one and in reading group situations
- Preparing resources for the class teacher
- Preparing booklets
- Assisting with the organising and running of Open Days
- Assisting with the organising and running of Cultural Afternoons (held on Thursdays and focusing on, for example, Aboriginal art, cooking damper, the history of indigenous culture)
- Preparing homework sheets for the students
- Roll completion and data entry into Data Jug
- Running the Breakfast Club (7-9 am)
- Managing of student lunches
- Assisting students with in-class activities
- Cleaning up following in-class activities
- Hand delivering student report cards with teachers
- Behaviour management.

The final point noted above – behaviour management – seemed to be a major focus of the teacher aides' work. One of them, during the course of the focus group, noted that they were like "bouncers for the classroom". In regard to this work, they suggested that the students often responded "better" to them than they did to the classroom teachers' efforts to manage student behaviour.

Indigenous Cultural Perspectives

The teacher aides and support staff spoke of their role in ensuring that indigenous cultural perspectives were apparent in the work of teachers and the broader extra-curricula program of the school. In discussing the ways in which they assisted teachers in relation to the embedding of indigenous cultural perspectives, they noted that teacher turn-over was a significant factor – and one which means that more work is required of them with the arrival of new staff members in order to get these staff members 'up to speed' in relation to indigenous cultural perspectives. They also suggested that non-indigenous teachers needed further Professional Development in order to gain further insight into, and knowledge of, indigenous cultures.

Working with Teachers

As might be expected, the discussion held with the teacher aides and support staff indicated that they had variable experiences in terms of working with teachers. Some teacher aides expressed that view that teachers could make better use of them – be more inclusive, while others suggested that most teachers make use of their expertise in relation to indigenous knowledge and that they were given 'space' in the classroom.

Discussing the approach of teachers, and speaking of her own role, one of the teacher aide's suggested that she offered different ways of working with students than the classroom teacher. Specifically, she suggested that she was able to break down the language used by the non-indigenous teacher for the kids. She also noted that this was important work because the "kids get frustrated" with the language 'barrier'.

Additionally, one support staff member suggested that the kids read better for the teacher aides because they are "more relaxed with them" (i.e., the teacher aides).

Observations of Teacher Classroom Practice

The teacher aides' and support staff members' observations of the work carried out by teachers indicate that 'shifts' in teacher practice are both desirable and necessary. Comments regarding their observations are as follows:

- Students are not provided with challenging enough work
- That not enough time is dedicated to engaging students in writing tasks, insufficient writing undertaken by students
- That not enough time is dedicated to engaging students in Maths tasks, insufficient Maths undertaken by students
- Insufficient time is spent on tasks by students
- No homework is given to students by classroom teachers (although some teacher aides prepare homework sheets for the students)
- Little or no work on/with computers is undertaken by students.

In view of these observations, the teacher aides and support staff members offered a number of suggestions in relation to improving student engagement and educational outcomes. These included:

- Challenge students more – i.e., teachers to provide more challenging work for students
- Engage students in more 'hands on' work
- Engage students in work on/with computers
- Involve students in more video/film production work
- Teachers to use software games as learning tools
- Have students undertake more writing and maths tasks in class
- Teachers to give homework to students in order to 'stretch' them
- Teachers to provide students with more time to spend on focused / challenging tasks
- Provide more intensive literacy support for students – for example, one on one support in a context of withdrawal.

Parental Involvement

Of particular significance to the 'Leading Indigenous Literacy Pilot Project' is the suggestion by a support staff member that parents don't know about literacy – nor do they know about the current project.

In relation to parent involvement more broadly, one support staff member suggested that getting parents involved in their child's schooling experience was "hard alright' and that "1 or 2 might come … since I've been working here, that's one of the hardest things – to get parents involved". She also spoke positively of teachers in relation to this, adding that the "teachers go out of their way to make parents welcome."

The teacher aide's spoke in mixed terms about parental engagement, suggesting: "Trying to get parents to come and be involved in their education – that's the biggest challenge" … "Need to break the barrier", "Some parents ask about kids at the store", "Some (are) really happy to talk and hear, others are negative, not interested", "Some are good, some are ignorant – don't want to know". Another suggested that, "some of the parents can be cheeky about it". In regard to this final point, there was general consensus that their (i.e., the aides) not being teacher-trained seemed to be part of the problem in regards to parent's interactions with them.

Overall, parental involvement was clearly seen to be desirable, with one teacher aide noting: "It would be really good to get some parents involved".

The support staff members and teacher aides offered a number of suggestions in relation to getting parents involved. These included:

- Getting parents involved in fundraising to facilitate excursions for students
- Inviting parents to Culture Days
- Inviting parents in to classrooms to work with reading groups
- Writing a letter to parents and/or going to see them to invite them to attend afternoon teas and chat about how their kids are going
- Picking parents up in the bus and transporting them to the school to participate in school activities.

Absenteeism

The teacher aides and support staff members noted that absenteeism was a major issue. In relation to this, they noted that doing the work necessary to get these students 'up to speed' in relation to work missed during their absence was "hard" for both the teachers and themselves.

Resources for Students

The teacher aides and support workers noted that students did not have the opportunity to take books home to read – and also suggested that this was "because they don't bring them back". Additionally, the Library is not open to students for their use at either lunchtime or after school. While the staff suggested that this was a human resource issue – with no one to 'man' it – one teacher aide indicated that she would be participating in an upcoming Librarian in-service/course. It was also mentioned by several staff members that the resources in the library were "not that good" – that they were out of date.

Role of Support Staff in the 'Leading Indigenous Literacy Pilot Project'

In terms of this project, it appears that most of the teacher aides have not been involved in the Indigenous Band Scales training or the Oral Language Sampling training or process. One of the teacher aides spoke of the oral sampling in the following way: "I don't know much about it … Teachers take kids out, don't tell aids anything about it".

Additionally, it appears that the teacher aides and support staff are not aware of this project – have they been informed of it. In view of this, one support staff member suggested that the teacher aides should be included in the project and that it was important to "give them (i.e., the aides) the responsibility".

Overall Suggestions from the Researchers

Given the data collected during the interviews and focus groups conducted with the indigenous teacher aides and support staff the following actions are recommended:

a. *Specific deadlines for data collection need to be set.*

b. *That these staff members are explicitly informed about the 'Leading Indigenous Literacy Pilot Project' and what might be their role(s) in ensuring the success of it.*

c. *That these staff members are provided with the necessary Professional Development opportunities (i.e., Indigenous Bandscale Training, Oral Language Sampling Training) required to participate productively in the project.*

d. *That the observations of teacher pedagogical practice – as offered by these staff members – be noted and addressed by school leaders as necessary in order to bring about a 'shift' in classroom practice (i.e., to shift classroom practice so that it serves to enhance the educational opportunities provided to students).*

e. *That these staff members be involved in the administering of student tests/assessment items (in light of the view that students are more relaxed when working with indigenous staff members).*

f. *That appropriate access to the library and computing services is offered to students – and human resource issues addressed in relation to this.*

Finally, it should be noted that the teacher aides and other indigenous support staff at St Michael's School are a major strength of the school and its organisational structure. They provide significant support to both staff and students.

3.2 ST TERESA'S COLLEGE, ABERGOWRIE

3.2.1 TEACHERS

Focus groups and interviews were conducted with the Year 8 and Year 9 teachers at St Teresa's College, Abergowrie.

During the course of these interviews, the following findings emerged.

Indigenous Bandscales Training and Implementation

Two of the three Year 8 teachers and two of the three Year 9 teachers had undertaken training in the Indigenous Bandscales. Of the two staff members who had not completed this training, one was a new member of staff while the other had simply 'missed' the training.

The Year 9 teachers noted that they had not yet completed the implementation of these bandscales.

Two of the Year 8 teachers also noted that they had not undertaken the implementation of the Indigenous bandscales. The third Year 8 teacher said that he had implemented these "at various levels", and spoke of the process as being "very fragmented". He noted that the process had, to date, involved Libby taking student work to analyse – and of himself as having little to do with the overall process so far.

Student Written Work Samples

In terms of the collection of student written work samples, both the Year 8 and 9 teachers noted that samples had been collected but that these had not been mapped against the bandscales. They said that Libby had collected these samples and that she was involved in helping the teachers to level the teachers. One teacher spoke of having done some work on the analysis of the samples with Libby during a recent Professional Development session.

The teachers suggested that the current process for collection of samples was "not structured enough in general", was "willy-nilly". Given this, they suggested that they

required further training and direction from Libby in regards to this process. They also noted the need for "time" to undertake this work – "formal time set aside".

Student Reading Levels

The teachers of Year 9 are yet to commence collecting student reading samples, but suggested that they are "on to [this] now".

The Year 8 teachers spoke of the role of the Curriculum Coordinator in regard the collection of reading samples. Of this, they told how he, along with the assistance of a teacher aide, currently withdraws individual students for reading sessions. In terms of this, the teachers stated that they did not make use of the data collected during these sessions at present, and noted that it would be more useful if the Curriculum Coordinator offered formal feedback – as opposed to the more informal feedback currently provided to them. One of the Year 8 teachers also spoke of the "informal" program in place whereby teachers are encouraged to listen to individual students read for 5 or so minutes a day and make notes in relation to this.

First Steps Training and Implementation

Two of the three Year 8 teachers have had training in the First Steps program. One of them noted that the relevant books are not always accessible for teacher use however, and suggested that additional texts need to be supplied to the school for greater access.

Two of the three Year 9 teachers had been exposed to First Steps in the past but had not been recently in-serviced in the program.

Success Maker Program

The teachers noted that Success Maker program was used by students during evening homework sessions. They also expressed the view that this was "not enough" and that the students needed to make further "regular" use of the program.

Whole School Reading Program

The teachers noted the efforts of the Curriculum Coordinator in starting to work on a Whole School Reading Program – suggesting it was in "its early stages" and speaking of the withdrawal practices of the Curriculum Coordinator and teacher aide (as discussed

above). The Year 8 teachers – those whose students were withdrawn for intensive one on one reading – suggested that the process in place at the current moment was somewhat "hit and miss", and that if the program was to be successful, staff would need to have more time and teacher aide assistance to implement it.

Individualised Literacy and Language Learning Opportunities
Individualised literacy and language learning programs are not currently planned for, or used, at either the Year 8 or 9 level. In relation to this, one of the Year 8 teachers suggested that these would "definitely" be in place "by the end of 2010" given the "support coming in".

Collaborative Work with Colleagues
The Year 8 teachers spoke of working together to engage in "informal planning", "unit planning" and sharing resources for these units.

The Year 9 teachers indicated that they work across the year level in both informal and formal ways in preparing for their classes.

Have I (Staff Member) Learned More About Literacy Through this Project?
The Year 8 teachers suggested that the current project – and in particular the conversation with us, the researchers – had helped raise their understanding of the project and literacy. One of them also noted "handouts to teachers about students' community languages" as being useful.

The teachers of Year 9 noted that the project had been helpful – "for sure" – in terms of their understandings about literacy and the literacy needs of their students. They suggested that it was helpful "because we can identify something properly" given their 'new' knowledge. The Year 9 teachers also noted that the use of an "outsider perspective", as offered by Libby, was helpful.

Whole School Approach to Literacy Learning
The Year 9 teachers were not, on the whole, aware of anything specific happening in relation to the development of a whole school approach to literacy. They were however

aware of the visits by Myra Driese (QUT) and her work in implementing the *What Works* program.

The Year 8 teachers – in line with the principles of a whole school plan – noted that literacy components were identified within unit planning across KLAs.

Suggestions/Comments from the Staff

- The staff was generally positive about the project in terms of its aim of improving outcomes for students: "I'm really just glad something's being done, it's heartening".
- The staff was generally welcoming of the project in regard to its potential to facilitate a "shift in culture" within the school: "Definitely, welcoming, indeed".
- While still a little uncertain about the project on the whole, the teachers identified the "constraints of time" as being a barrier to the success of the project, suggesting "we need more time to do justice to it – time with the child".
- The staff requested Professional Development in relation to identifying student language groups.
- The staff noted a desire to further explore – and gain access to – literacy-focused software for use in the classrooms/computer labs.
- The teachers noted the lack of communication with/feedback from both parents and the dormitory staff in relation to student work and learning. Of this, they suggested: "We don't have any contact with parents"; "House parents don't discuss anything educational". They also advocated for greater feedback from house parents.
- There appeared some difference in teachers' access to information about students' medical conditions – those that potentially impact upon learning.

Overall Suggestions from the Researchers

a. *Specific deadlines for data collection need to be set.*
   As with St Michael's, deadlines need to be set in relation to data collection and the teachers and administration informed of these. Monitoring of the process by Libby – and the timelines to be met – would enhance the timeliness of data collection. Appropriate resources (including non-contact time) should also be provided to teachers in order to meet the established timelines.

b. *Outline the end point so that teachers can see what they are aiming for.*

As with St Michael's, teachers need to be further briefed about the project and its overall aims – i.e., what is the end point, what does it hope to achieve? So, too, they need to be further familiarised with their role in the project – particularly in relation to how to achieve the aims of it and what this means for them in practical terms.

c. *There needs to be further training on Indigenous Bandscales and First Steps and more sharing about what strategies are working for teachers.*

Teachers need further training in the areas of Indigenous Bandscales and First Step strategies. At present, teachers are not familiar enough with, as to effectively use, these. So, too, this training would be most effective if it were to be on going and sustained – not delivered as a 'one-off'. This training would also be most effective if framed within the guiding principles of the "Closing the Gap" initiative and by the aims of the "Leading Indigenous Literacy" project. So, too, First Steps materials must be more readily available in the school for teacher's use.

d. *There needs to be teacher release to complete Written Work Sampling and opportunities to work with Libby in relation to the analysis of the data.*

Teacher release time is required in order to speed up the process of Written Work Sampling. The teachers should also work in closer consultation with Libby in relation to the data collected and how this can be used in terms of informing teacher planning and classroom practice.

e. *Communications with House Parents need to be enhanced.*

At present, there is little communication between House Parents and teachers in regard the 'education' of students. This should be enhanced in order to provide both parties with a 'fuller picture' of student progress and needs.

f. *Year 8 curriculum planning and classroom practice should be reviewed and greater connections with the work of the Curriculum Coordinator and Libby made.*

The work of the Year 8 teachers should be more tightly informed by, and aligned to, the data gathered by the Curriculum Coordinator and Libby in regards student reading and written work samples. Use of this data should be made by the teachers in their planning and practice within the Year 8 context. That is, their current practices should be 'transformed' such that they are further data-driven.

g. Year 8 and 9 teachers should be encouraged, and supported in their efforts, to commence work on developing Individualised Literacy and Language Learning Plans for students.

At present there is no evidence of such planning – while the apparent need for such is clear.

Finally, at this stage – as was the case at St Michael's – it was too difficult to identify 'best practice'. What was apparent, and in need of attention, was the 'busy work' – as opposed to intellectually engaging work – with which many students were required to engage.

3.2.2 ADMINISTRATION TEAM

Individual interviews were conducted with the administrators at St Teresa's College, Abergowrie – including: the Principal, the two Deputy Principals, the Curriculum Coordinator and the Director of Teaching and Learning.

The following key themes emerged during the course of the interviews with the various members of the administration.

Shifting School Culture – Curriculum as a Driver

There was discussion around the point that the culture of the school in the past (and at present) revolved around pastoral care and that the residential sector of the college was seen as the driver. It was suggested that previously (and still) this had seen a lack of accountability in terms of curriculum development and delivery in the school.

There was also a perception that the students were presently being provided with a "lack of challenge". As one assistance principal noted: "The kids are idling, they're ready to learn – let's go ahead and engage them."

While noting the above mentioned points, there was a clear sense that members of the administration team were working together to shift the culture of the school – that is, to shift it towards a sharp(er) focus on curriculum.

In their efforts to shift the focus towards the curriculum, the administration team had implemented a 'primary/middle schooling' model in Years 8 and 9 – whereby the same teacher taught the one class for five of the KLAs. So, too, they had worked towards seeing the tying in of "literacy across all KLAs", and of promoting the view that "all teachers of KLAs are teachers of literacy". Additionally, there has been the appointment of a Director of Teaching and Learning, whose brief it is to mentor staff. Furthermore, this is a plan to establish a Learning Enhancement Centre at the school in 2010. This centre will provide the space to work with gifting and talented students and also offer a Reading Room (and in this way links to the aim of developing a Whole School Reading Program).

The What Works Program

The *What Works* program, as it will be implemented in the school, is seen by the administration team to have clear links to the promotion of 'curriculum as a driver'. The Principal noted that the program will serve as a focus in relation to work program development and teacher pedagogy.

The Curriculum Coordinator is responsible for working with Myra Driese (critical friend) in the implementation of the *What Works* program – and the subsequent development of a whole school approach to literacy and language teaching and learning in 2010.

Whole School Approaches: Reading, Literacy and Language

At present, neither a Whole School Reading Program nor a whole school approach to literacy and language teaching and learning are in effect. Currently, the Curriculum Coordinator is involved (along with a teacher aide) in the process of withdrawing students for individual reading lessons – as a first step in establishing a whole school reading program. Working in the context of a reading room, the students are involved in reading "levelled books" and doing "Dolce words". As noted above, the Curriculum Coordinator is also responsible for the development and rollout of a whole school approach to literacy and language teaching and learning.

The aim is to have both a whole school reading program and a whole school approach to literacy and language teaching and learning in place by 2010. In view of this – and indeed the large scale and time consuming nature of these tasks – the Curriculum

Coordinator noted that it would be useful to garner greater support from CEO curriculum and consultancy staff (namely, Stefanie and Gary).

Individualised Literacy and Language Learning Plans

The Curriculum Coordinator noted that "the teachers are possibly not aware" that the development of Individualised Literacy and Language Learning Plans for students is an aim of the current pilot project. In view of this, he stated that his next steps for action were as follows: sit down with teachers and teacher aides to discuss the plans, to plan with staff the individualised learning programs, to communicate with parents in regard the programs, and to establish this process as an on-going one (that is, constantly refocusing on these programs). He also noted the importance of ensuring that these programs were informed by baseline data.

Indigenous Bandscales, Sampling and First Steps

The Curriculum Coordinator spoke of working with Libby and Katie (speech pathologist) on oral sampling of at-risk students and bandscales. He also noted the work of teacher aides in collecting Year 8 student written work samples aides (Lorna –currently on leave) and in conducting reading sessions with the students (Natalie).

Additionally, he noted that the *First Steps* program had "gone a bit by the way side" in terms of implementation in the college. In view of this, he spoke of his aim – and of the need – to have it "put back on the agenda", to have it serve as a focal point in terms of teacher planning and practice.

Behaviour Management

There was a sense among the administration team that staff would benefit from Professional Development in relation to behaviour management issues/strategies.

Current Views of the Literacy and Language Learning Pilot Project

The Principal (given his recent appointment to the college) noted that the details of the project were "still a little vague". That said, he noted: "I think the method of doing it is right" – i.e., Libby coming to schools. So, too, he supported the notion of having Libby revisit the school, of having her available to offer "more on-going guidance".

The Curriculum Coordinator noted that staff turnover – and absences due to such occasions as leave – was hampering the overall progress of the pilot.

Other Comments/Issues

There was some confusion among administrators as to where the funding pool was located to resource the project.

Overall Suggestions from the Researchers

    a. *Clarity in relation to the funding mechanisms of/for the project, and subsequent rollout of resources, must be attained.*

    b. *There needs to be on-going support, overall, from Libby in relation to the rollout of the project. This is particularly necessary in the case of supporting the demanding role of the Curriculum Coordinator in the facilitation of the project.*

    c. *Professional Development in relation to Behaviour Management should be provided to staff and administration members.*

    d. *The administration team should be supported, in whatever ways possible, to ensure the shift in school culture – towards a culture that is curriculum driven and accountability bound – occurs.*

4. **<u>APPENDICES</u>**

Indigenous Literacy and Language Learning Pilot Project Evaluation
Term Three 2009

SCHOOL: St Michael's, Palm Island

INTERVIEWEE _____

* Complete if relevant – i.e. classroom teacher

Student Enrolment	
Male	
Female	
Total # of students	

1. With the start of the Literacy and Language Learning Pilot Project in Term 4 last year, some staff members did the Introductory Indigenous Bandscales training.

a) Did you?

b) Have you made use of the Indigenous Bandscales in your planning, teaching and assessment since doing the training?
   Can you talk about how, in what ways, you have made use of these?

c) Are you finding the use of these to be useful/successful? If so, how?
   If not, why not?

2. Have you and/or your students been involved in the oral language sampling that has taken place so far?

a) Have you found this data to be helpful, to have provided you with useful information? If so, in what ways? What use have you been able to make of the data?
   If not, can you suggest why it has not been useful?

3. Have you had any Professional Development in the First Steps Program, the First Steps strategy bank around reading, writing or oral language?

a) If so, how have you made use of the First Steps strategies in your teaching?

4. One of the aims of the project is to develop <u>individualised</u> literacy and language learning opportunities for students.
Can you talk through some of the ways you have gone about doing this?
What are some of the strategies you have used in your planning, teaching and assessment?
What activities have the students been involved in doing?

5. Have you received any feedback about the type of work you have been doing with students– work that has been informed by this project?

a) From the students

b) From parents

6. Have you had any opportunities to work collaboratively with your colleagues?
To have professional conversations or to plan collaboratively etc?
Can you talk us through this – and has it been useful?

7. While still early days – do you think that working on this project has raised your awareness of the literacy and language learning needs of your students? If so, how?

8. Another of the aims of the project is to see that a whole school approach to literacy and language teaching and learning is implemented in the school.

a) Can you talk about what is being done to address whole school planning for literacy and language at St Michael's.

b) What else do you think needs to be done? Would be useful or effective?

9. Are you aware of the work that is taking place with the community liaison officers about engaging the community in relation to this project and what it hopes to achieve in relation to student learning?
What do you know about this work?

10. Finally, what are your overall thoughts of the Literacy and Language Learning Pilot Project so far?

a) The positives?

b) The negatives?

c) Do you think it is on track for success?

d) Do you have any suggestions about how you would like to see it continue, to see it unfold?

11. Any other comments?

INFORMED CONSENT FORM: INTERVIEW

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	Professor Sue McGinty
PROJECT TITLE:	Leading Indigenous Literacy
SCHOOL	JCU School of Indigenous Studies

I understand that the aims of this project are to investigate, evaluate and report on current literacy teaching and learning practices at St Michael's School (Palm Island) and at Abergowrie College (Abergowrie) – under the banner of the 'Indigenous Literacy Project' currently being piloted in the schools. I also understand that in doing this it will seek to document 'best practice' and to recommend areas for further development in regard to literacy teaching and the conduct of this pilot at these 2 sites.

I understand that my participation will involve an interview **and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described**

in the information sheet.

I acknowledge that:

- any risks and possible effects of participating in the **interview** have been explained to my satisfaction;

- taking part in this study is voluntary and I am aware that I can stop taking part in it at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;

- that any information I give will be kept strictly confidential and that no names will be used to identify me with this study without my approval;

(Please tick to indicate consent)

I consent to be interviewed   ☐ **Yes**   ☐ **No**

Name: *(printed)*	
Signature:	**Date:**

If you have any queries about the project contact Sue McGinty:
Sue.McGinty@jcu.edu.au
Ph: 47 814642

If you have concerns about the ethics of this project contact Tina.Langford@jcu.edu.au

INFORMED CONSENT FORM: FOCUS GROUP

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	Professor Sue McGinty
PROJECT TITLE:	Leading Indigenous Literacy
SCHOOL	JCU School of Indigenous Studies

I understand that the aims of this project are to investigate, evaluate and report on current literacy teaching and learning practices at St Michael's School (Palm Island) and at Abergowrie College (Abergowrie) – under the banner of the 'Indigenous Literacy Project' currently being piloted in the schools. I also understand that in doing this it will seek to document 'best practice' and to recommend areas for further development in regard to literacy teaching and the conduct of this pilot at these 2 sites.

I understand that my participation will involve a focus group **and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described**

in the information sheet.

I acknowledge that:

- any risks and possible effects of participating in the **focus group** have been explained to my satisfaction;

- taking part in this study is voluntary and I am aware that I can stop taking part in it at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;

- that any information I give will be kept strictly confidential and that no names will be used to identify me with this study without my approval;

- confidentiality cannot be assured in focus groups.

(Please tick to indicate consent)

I consent to participate in a focus group			**Yes**		**No**

Name: *(printed)*	
Signature:	**Date:**

If you have any queries about the project contact Sue McGinty:
Sue.McGinty@jcu.edu.au
Ph: 47 814642
If you have concerns about the ethics of this project contact Tina.Langford@jcu.edu.au

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INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

PROJECT   Professor Sue McGinty

COORDINATOR

PROJECT TITLE: Leading Indigenous Literacy

SCHOOL   JCU School of Indigenous Studies

CONTACT DETAILS   Sue.McGinty@jcu.edu.au
                       Ph: 47 814642

What is the project about?

This project aims to investigate, evaluate and report on current literacy teaching and learning practices at Catholic Education Schools of Palm Island and at Abergowrie College – under the banner of the 'Indigenous Literacy Project' currently being piloted in the schools. So, too, it seeks to document 'best practice' and to recommend areas for further development in regard to literacy teaching at these 2 sites. It is anticipated that this research will inform the 'work' of teachers and other key stakeholders located at the 2 schools (and Catholic Education Office and like school sites) and, in this way, facilitate effective teaching of Indigenous students in regards to literacy.

What does it involve you in?

The research evaluation of the Palm Island and Abergowrie schools' pilot literacy programs will be carried out in two stages: Term 3 2009 and Term 3 2010 (as according to the School Calendar Year). Data will be collected over two days in each term by:

- One on one interviews or focus group interviews with the teaching and support staff of each school for approximately one hour at a venue with suits them. Teachers and support staff of each school will know in advance of who is going to be involved in the interviews or focus groups, and when and where these will take place.
- One on one interviews or focus group interviews with representatives from Catholic Education Office (Townsville) will – if deemed necessary by these representatives – be for approximately one hour at a venue which suits them. Representatives from the Catholic Education Office (Townsville) will know in advance of who is going to be involved in the interviews or focus groups, and when and where these will take place.

Permission will be sought to make field notations during the course of the interview sessions. No one under 18 years of age will be interviewed or be identifiable.

Our commitment to you:
The researchers will maintain confidentiality of the information provided but wish to inform you that they are unable to guarantee that confidentiality will be maintained by other participants in group discussions.

Your responses will be strictly confidential. The data from the study will be de-identified – and as such, no individual can be identified as identifiers have been removed.

The data from the study will be used in research publications and a report to the Catholic Education Office (Townsville). You will not be identified in any way in these publications.

Participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from the evaluative research process at any stage.

Thank you for taking time to consider this request.

If you are willing to participate in this project, please keep this sheet for your personal records and, complete and sign the consent statements attached.

If you have any queries about the project contact Sue McGinty:
Sue.McGinty@jcu.edu.au

If you have concerns about the ethics of this project contact Tina Langford:
Tina.Langford@jcu.edu.au

Indigenous Literacy and Language Learning Pilot Project Evaluation
Term Three 2009

SCHOOL: Abergowrie College

INTERVIEWEE _____

* Complete if relevant – i.e. classroom teacher

Student Enrolment	
Males - Total	

1. With the start of the Literacy and Language Learning Pilot Project in Term 4 last year, some staff members did the Introductory Indigenous Bandscales training.

a) Did you?

b) Have you made use of the Indigenous Bandscales in your planning, teaching and assessment since doing the training?
   Can you talk about how, in what ways, you have made use of these?

c) Are you finding the use of these to be useful/successful? If so, how?
   If not, why not?

2. Have you been involved in collecting student written work samples? *(YR8)*

a) What have you done with these samples once you have collected them –
   in terms of analysing student work and gathering data on the students?
   Eg – applied the Indigenous bandscales to level students

b) Have you found this data to be helpful, to have provided you with useful
   information? If so, in what ways? What use have you been able to make
   of the data?
   If not, can you suggest why it has not been useful?

3. Have you been involved in collecting samples of students' reading levels?

a) What have you done with these samples once you have collected them –
in terms of analysing student work and gathering data on the students?
Eg – applied the Indigenous bandscales to level students

b) Have you found this data to be helpful, to have provided you with useful
information? If so, in what ways? What use have you been able to make
of the data?
If not, can you suggest why it has not been useful?

4. Have you had any Professional Development in the First Steps   Program,
the First Steps strategy bank around reading, writing or oral   language?

a) If so, how have you made use of the First Steps strategies in your
teaching?

5. One of the project's aims is to implement the Success Maker program at
Abergowerie. Has this been done yet?
If so, can you talk a little bit about this program.

6. One of the other initiatives of the project is to develop a Whole School
Reading Program. Has this come into effect yet?
If so, can you talk a little bit about this program.

7. One of the aims of the project is to develop individualised literacy and
language learning opportunities for students.
Can you talk through some of the ways you have gone about doing this?
What are some of the strategies you have used in your planning, teaching
and assessment?
What activities have the students been involved in doing?

8. Have you received any feedback about the type of work you have been
doing with students– work that has been informed by this project?

a) From the students

b) From parents

9. Have you had any opportunities to work collaboratively with your colleagues?
To have professional conversations or to plan collaboratively etc?
Can you talk us through this – and has it been useful?

10. While still early days – do you think that working on this project has raised your awareness of the literacy and language learning needs of your students? If so, how?

11. Another of the aims of the project is to see that a whole school approach to literacy and language teaching and learning is implemented in the school.

a) Can you talk about what is being done to address whole school planning for literacy and language at Abergowrie College.

b) What else do you think needs to be done? Would be useful or effective?

12. Finally, what are your overall thoughts of the Literacy and Language Learning Pilot Project so far?

a) The positives?

b) The negatives?

c) Do you think it is on track for success?

d) Do you have any suggestions about how you would like to see it continue, to see it unfold?

13. Any other comments?