

“Aboriginal Rural Training in Juvenile Justice”

Wayne McPherson

Coordinator – Aboriginal Rural Training Program
Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture
YANCO NSW 2703

Dave O’Grady

Principal
Shepherds Park School
WAGGA WAGGA NSW 2650

Keynote Address presented at
The International Forum of Education in Penal Systems
4th National Conference

“Creating New Learning Cultures”

Fremantle, 8-10 November 1999
Western Australia

SUMMARY

In June 1998, Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture in partnership with the ACTU-Lend Lease Foundation, Australian National Training Authority, Shepherds Park School and Riverina Juvenile Justice Centre, introduced selected modules from the Aboriginal Rural Training Program to Aboriginal Students on Remand and Committal in the Riverina Juvenile Justice Centre.

The modules that were offered were selected from the Aboriginal Rural Training Program run by Murrumbidgee College and included operations and maintenance courses on Small Motors, Motorcycles, Tractors and Chainsaws. These modules were common to various Rural Traineeships and so provided opportunities for students to obtain credit transfer to other Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses.

The program applied principles and practices that have been found to increase the provision of culturally appropriate VET for Aboriginal peoples including:

- flexible teaching and learning strategies based on oral, visual and practical techniques
- consultation and liaison with Aboriginal and student communities
- flexible guidelines for learning and classroom behaviour
- group learning and assessment rather than individual, competitive learning and assessment

Overall, the evaluation found that the objectives of the project were achieved including:

- delivery of relevant modules from the NSW Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board (VETAB) accredited Certificate II in Rural Skills (Aboriginal Communities)
- close consultation with staff and students from the Shepherds Park School
- provision of culturally appropriate delivery modes, instructional strategies and learner activities
- provision of accredited training and credit transfer into further post-secondary VET courses for Aboriginal students
- awarding successful participants with “Statements of Attainment” which are nationally recognised by industry and other VET providers
- addressing recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

While the introduction of VET into Shepherds Park School was associated with reduced incidents of disruptive and anti-social behaviour and an increase in the number of students earning reward points, the most significant effects were reported from the observations of Senior Youth Workers and School teachers, namely:

- “you would hardly see these kids smile once week, when they’re doing the Murrumbidgee College training they would be smiling all day”
- “they were looking forward to something, they had a bigger responsibility when they were out [on day release]”

- “they were more confident – you could tell by the way they talked about their certificates”
- “there was a flow-on effect in school, there were fewer incidents during periods when VET was available”
- “it was a motivational tool – the students tried to keep their “levels” [privileges] up”.

SHEPHERDS PARK SCHOOL

Shepherds Park School is established within the Riverina Juvenile Justice Centre, located at Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, Australia. The school has been in operation since 1985 with students coming from western New South Wales as well as from the Riverina area. The maximum enrolment is 34 male students aged from 10-21 years, all of whom are either being held on remand awaiting a court appearance or having been sentenced to detention. The length of stay of students at the Riverina Juvenile Justice Centre varies from a number of days to several years. The average length of stay is currently 6.5 months.

Shepherds Park School provides education, social and vocational programs for students by the implementation of strategies that allow for the development of as broad and challenging curriculum as possible. The majority of students are of secondary age, many having severe educational deficits. The diversified program offered aims to promote positive learning outcomes. School staff work closely with Juvenile Justice personnel and Aboriginal community members, in an endeavour to provide an environment where the young people feel secure and safe in the knowledge that their individual needs are being met.

Student numbers vary on a daily basis, but can reach 34-36 with an average annual turnover of approximately 170 students. Although the legal age range is 10 - 21 years the reality is that most of the students are currently between the age of 16 - 18 years. At times the Aboriginal representation of students can be as high as 75% with an average of 45% over time.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Behavioural and emotional disturbances are frequent amongst the students, with the majority of students having had negative experiences of education in the past. This tends to impact on the school environment. As participation in school or unit programs is compulsory for all students, effective teaching can be difficult, unless appropriate programs are developed and put into place. To this end, a lot of work and planning occurs before a program is actually initiated and included in the curriculum.

Programs are designed to meet the specific educational, cultural, personal and vocational needs and interests of every student. Wherever possible, education and training is accredited in order to maximise the opportunity for students to access further education and training or employment upon return to the community. All new students are individually assessed upon entry allowing staff to develop Individual

Education and Training Programs (IETPs). These programs are developed with individual student input and are regularly reviewed and updated according to the needs and focus areas of students.

The school has a range of support programs for students. These programs have been developed by the staff and support personnel and are identified through consultation with the students, community and caregivers. There is a cooperative and productive relationship between the school and Juvenile Justice staff, allowing for the development of a positive teaching and learning environment.

Owing to the high Aboriginal student representation, specific programs have been put in place with all students having the opportunity to:

- explore Aboriginal culture across Australia
- learn about the language, customs, artefacts and dreaming stories of the Wiradjuri nation
- have exposure to Elders of the Wiradjuri Nation as well as visiting Elders from other language groups
- accessing cultural camps, outings and excursions

The Aboriginal Education Assistant, the Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer and the Aboriginal Consultant all have major support roles in these programs.

During 1998 it was apparent that the existing curriculum did not appropriately cater for the essential development of vocational skills enabling students vocational pathways into Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and other training providers. The curriculum did address students needs in literacy, numeracy, living skills, personal development, social skills and health.

To this end, the Shepherds Park School along with some of the other Community Care Schools attached to the Juvenile Detention Centre, applied for funding from the NSW Department of Education and Training to deliver Joint Secondary Schools TAFE courses “on site” within the confines of the Detention Centres.

This initiative allowed for the Principals of the schools to bring nationally accredited vocational courses “on site”, allowing students access to courses that would help them obtain vocational skills and qualifications. These skills and qualifications were to be provided with the overall aim of trying to break the crime cycle and give students some real vocational skills and options upon exit from the Detention Centres.

Negotiations were made to trial a number of Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses at Shepherds Park School with the Riverina Institute of TAFE at Wagga Wagga. The courses delivered over the next 12 months included Bricklaying, Community Radio and Journalism, Metal Fabrication and Engineering, Information Technology, Landscaping and Paving, Aboriginal Art and Culture.

The school was approached by Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture (MCA) in mid-1998 to pilot the Aboriginal Rural Training Program (ARTP) modules in rural skills as

a best practice demonstration project. Up until that time the ARTP rural skills modules had not been delivered within a Juvenile Justice setting [although they had been successfully trialed in adult correctional facilities]. Shepherds Park School was, and still is, the only school in a Juvenile Detention Centre [certainly in NSW and probably in Australia] where this type of program has been used. The ACTU-Lend Lease Foundation initiated the project and provided joint funding with the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA).

Shepherds Park School was selected as the site for the demonstration project due to:

- the expansive and culturally appropriate programs offered to Aboriginal students through the normal school curriculum
- the support of the Aboriginal Elders and the community for programs and delivery models that are run at the school
- the success of a wide range of other VET programs that are run as part of the school curriculum
- the enthusiasm of the whole school staff and supportive leadership of the school Principal

The best practice demonstration project was implemented in 1998 and resulted in significant qualitative and quantitative outcomes for students. These outcomes have been documented in the VET evaluation reports conducted by the Shepherds Park School and JAM Training and Development Services, Sydney.

The program continued throughout 1999 with funding from the Department of Education and Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) under the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP). Negotiations are currently taking place with other funding bodies to continue the delivery of the ARTP modules for the Year 2000.

ABORIGINAL RURAL TRAINING PROGRAM

The Aboriginal Rural Training Program (ARTP) is one of the externally funded programs of Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture at Yanco, which is a Registered Training Organisation of NSW Agriculture. The program provides culturally appropriate Vocational Education and Training (VET) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned properties, organisations and communities. The inception of the ARTP in 1989 has resulted in the development of a number of full-time courses and short courses specifically for Australia's Indigenous peoples. The accredited curricula have been developed in close consultation with Indigenous peoples to ensure that their training needs are met. The courses are nationally recognised and are based on the appropriate national competency standards and national Training Packages. The courses have an average completion rate of eighty five percent (85%).

Course content, delivery modes and venues are decided in close consultation with course participants, communities and enterprises. Programs have been delivered at various sites throughout New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

During 1997 one third of the graduates at the College's conferring of awards ceremony were Indigenous people, in contrast to 1963-1988 when there were no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates. The increasing demand for culturally appropriate vocational education and training in the rural sector by Indigenous peoples is evidence of a significant practice change brought about in no small way by the ARTP's contribution.

Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture was the 1998 NSW Training Provider of the Year and was a finalist in the 1998 National Training Provider of the Year award. In 1998 the College also received the inaugural National Indigenous People's Training Award from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Training Advisory Council (ATSIPTAC). The award was in recognition of Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture's exceptional contribution to vocational education and training through the ARTP for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

COURSE DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Experiences from the ARTP's involvement with training programs for Indigenous people shows that careful consideration and attention must be given to the following during course design, development and implementation:

- relevance of course content
- suitable learning environments
- learning styles of Indigenous people
- appropriate teaching strategies
- appropriate learner activities
- appropriate methods of assessment
- suitable teachers and trainers

Relevance of course content, learning environments, delivery methods and modes must be determined in close consultation with Indigenous people. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Training Advisory Council (ATSIPTAC) Position Paper titled "*Working together to break the cycle*" states that access to education by Indigenous people can be improved by:

- encouraging Indigenous people to participate in decision making processes which directly affect the educational opportunities of their communities
- developing Indigenous-inclusive curricula to make formal education processes more appropriate and relevant to Indigenous people
- providing targeted resources and student support structures to deliver improved educational outcomes
- training and employing Indigenous education workers to build links between schools and Indigenous communities and assisting in the provision of targeted support programs.

All the above factors were taken into account during the consultative process for the Shepherds Park School Demonstration Project.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

Consultation

As with all other VET courses within the ARTP, the process for the ‘Best Practice Demonstration Project: Provision of Vocational Education and Training to Aboriginal Students on Remand and Committal in a NSW Juvenile Justice Facility’ commenced with consultations with the relevant community. Consultation included meetings with the Aboriginal juvenile offenders as well as with the Wiradjuri Council of Elders, the Wiradjuri people being the traditional language and cultural group in the region within which Wagga Wagga is located. Consultation also included the staff of the Shepherds Park School and the Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer from the NSW Department of Education and Training. Extensive consultations by MCA trainers with Shepherds Park School staff was an essential process in the course development. This consultative process allowed trainers to address students’ interests, literacy, language and numeracy skills, preferred learning styles and appropriate teaching and learning strategies.

As a result of the consultations, four training modules were selected for the project. The modules selected were based on the interests of the students, the relevance and usefulness of the content and skills and the available credit and articulation within a nationally recognised VET Certificate Pathway. These modules were Small Motors, Motorcycles, Chainsaws and Tractors all of which came from the Rural Skills Pathways.

Students

Enrolment was open to Aboriginal juvenile offenders at the Riverina Juvenile Justice Centre. Student numbers in each module were restricted for safety reasons. Generally, there were no entry requirements that students were required to meet in order to enrol and, as it was initially proposed that the modules would be brought into the Centre, there was no requirement that students were to be eligible for supervised day release. However, it became impractical for running the tractor module to bring sufficient equipment into the Centre to allow for adequate student practice, and so students were taken by bus to the Murrumbidgee College campus at Yanco. Consequently, one student who was not eligible for supervised day release became excluded from this module. The chainsaw module included one component of practice and experience in the bush in order to simulate real work conditions. Therefore some students were not able to participate fully in this module as they were not eligible for day release.

Trainers

The trainers were MCA staff who have “self elected” to teach with the ARTP. Although the majority of these trainers were not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, they had particular interests and affiliations with Aboriginal cultures and people. At least one trainer had previous experience teaching in an adult correctional

facility, while others had life experiences which were relevant to the context of the ARTP. There was one Technical Assistant employed by MCA who was Aboriginal and who assisted the teaching staff with most modules. In addition, some Senior Youth Workers with the Juvenile Justice Centre participated in one or more of the modules providing encouragement and assistance to the students under the direction of the trainers. One of these workers is an Elder in the Wiradjuri Community. An Aboriginal Liaison Officer was recruited by NSW Agriculture and was located with the ARTP at Yanco. This person provided liaison support during the latter months of the project.

Course Content

Course content was structured so that it focused on the implementation of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) in the application of practical skills to achieve a meaningful work related or life-experience related outcome, such as stripping a motor, routine maintenance on a motorcycle, or attaching farm equipment to a tractor. The delivery mode involved direct face-to-face teaching but the learning environment relied more on an outdoor and workshop environment than on a classroom setting. Group learning strategies were applied rather than individual and competitive learning strategies. While a classroom was available for group teaching of theory or underpinning knowledge, it was only used when necessary to use teaching aids such as whiteboards, overhead projectors and videos to illustrate or emphasise particular points. It should be noted that the content was arranged so that at the end of each training session students would have completed at least one small task on a particular item of machinery.

Course Delivery

The modules were delivered one at a time and were integrated into the Shepherds Park School Program in consultation with the Principal and staff of the school. Students attended the VET course one day per week from 9 am till 3 pm, or up to 5 pm, with breaks, depending on the students' concentration, interest levels and learning needs. The usual school day was 9 am to 3 pm. Each module was offered over six weeks, thus the duration for each module was flexible with a minimum duration of 30 hours and a maximum duration of 42 hours.

Most modules were delivered on site at the Juvenile Justice Centre with MCA training staff supplying and preparing sufficient equipment from MCA and trucking it in for each training session. The tractor module was an exception to this process as sufficient numbers of tractors and attachments, as well as open space, could not logistically be made available at the Juvenile Justice Centre. However, to commence the module, tractors were 'floated' into the Centre for preliminary training. In addition, the chainsaw module was taken outside of the Centre for one session when students were taken into the bush to apply and practice their crosscutting skills in a work related setting.

Student numbers in the modules were restricted for reasons of OHS and so that students could be given sufficient attention by the trainers. For example, the chainsaw module was restricted to six students participating.

Teaching and Learning Strategies

Verbal, visual and practical teaching strategies were used as the primary means of information transfer. Notes and manuals were used only as reinforcement for the primary means of transfer. Literacy and numeracy were integrated with the practical work skills learning. For example, ratios were integrated with the preparation of fuel for two-stroke engines and measurements were integrated with the selection of spanners. Terminology was introduced and defined as it became necessary to describe a feature or function of the machinery. This approach was supported by the school staff who liaised with the MCA staff to provide relevant literacy and numeracy exercises in regular classes at the school.

Overall, the strategies used in the project were consistent with the principles upon which the broader ARTP was based and allowed for high levels of flexibility, adaptability and cultural empathy to meet the needs of students.

PROJECT EVALUATION

An overall evaluation was conducted which determined:

“that Vocational Education in Shepherds Park School over a 15 week period in 1998, as compared to the same 15 week period in 1997 had a positive impact on student behaviour and management, as well as leading to significant vocational quantitative outcomes and personal qualitative outcomes”.

The evaluations were conducted by JAM Training and Development Services, Sydney and Shepherds Park School staff.

Methodology

The approach taken by JAM Training and Development Services was based on a performance improvement system model. This model applies a systems based methodology to the development, implementation and evaluation of programs. The primary focus of the evaluation was on the program objectives and outcomes.

Data collection strategies involved document review and survey of individuals and groups involved in the program. These groups included:

- Aboriginal juvenile offenders who were students in the program
- Shepherds Park School staff who interacted with the participants
- Riverina Juvenile Justice System staff who interacted with the participants

- Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture staff who delivered the training
- NSW Agriculture Aboriginal Liaison Officer
- Department of Education and Training Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer (ACLO)

The data analysis mainly utilised qualitative procedures and techniques. Generally the structure of the interview plan was the same for each group of participants with minor changes being made in the detail of the questions to customise for each group.

Results

Incident Report Comparison

Incident reports are for students who refuse to work or misbehave while in a classroom situation. The reports are written by the teachers and attract consequences/punishments/or loss of privileges for students.

Table 1 and Table 2 show a comparison between 1997 and 1998 incident reports for students during Terms 2 and 3 of each year.

Week	Term 2						Term 3										Total
	5	6	7	8	9	10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1997	7	15	18	15	4	11	15	1	13	11	4	7	7	20	20	0	168
1998	14	6	6	11	2	5	4	14	13	6	6	2	6	2	10	8	115

Table 1. Number of Students who received an Incident Report (Raw Score).

Week	Term 2						Term 3									
	5	6	7	8	9	10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1997	20	43	51	43	11	31	43	3	37	31	11	20	20	57	57	0
1998	48	17	17	38	7	17	14	48	45	17	17	7	21	7	34	27

Table 2. Percentage comparison of Incident Reports based on number of students .
[1997 – % based on 35 students and 1998 - % based on 29 students]

Summary

Table 1 and Table 2 indicate the general trend in a reduction of reports, indicating that students tended to be better motivated and more on task while at school. The anomalies are found in Week 5, Term 2 and Weeks 2 and 5, Term 3. These records show that there is a 31.5% reduction in the number of “in class” incident reports suggesting that students were enjoying the teaching and learning environment more so than they were for the same period of the previous year.

Qualifying level for “buy up” comparison

Every school lesson that students attend gain them incentive points. A student can earn between zero (0) and four (4) points, or a maximum of 24 points per day, based on his work effort, attitude and behaviour. At the end of the week the student’s points are added up and any points in excess of the qualifying standard becomes points or credits that can be saved or spent on “buy up” goods.

Table 3 and Table 4 show a comparison between 1997 and 1998 students who received “buy-up” points during Terms 2 and 3 of each year.

Week	Term 2						Term 3										Total
	5	6	7	8	9	10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1997	14	13	12	10	12	17	15	25	20	16	29	18	19	18	19	19	266
1998	17	22	18	20	27	21	22	28	22	26	24	24	24	24	18	25	352

Table 3. Number of Students who received “Buy Up” Points (Raw Score)

Week	Term 2						Term 3									
	5	6	7	8	9	10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1997	40	37	34	29	34	49	43	71	57	46	83	51	54	51	54	54
1998	59	76	62	69	93	72	76	97	76	90	83	83	83	83	62	86

Table 4. Percentage comparison of qualifying level for “Buy Up” Points based on number of students. [1997 – % based on 35 students and 1998 - % based on 29 students]

Summary

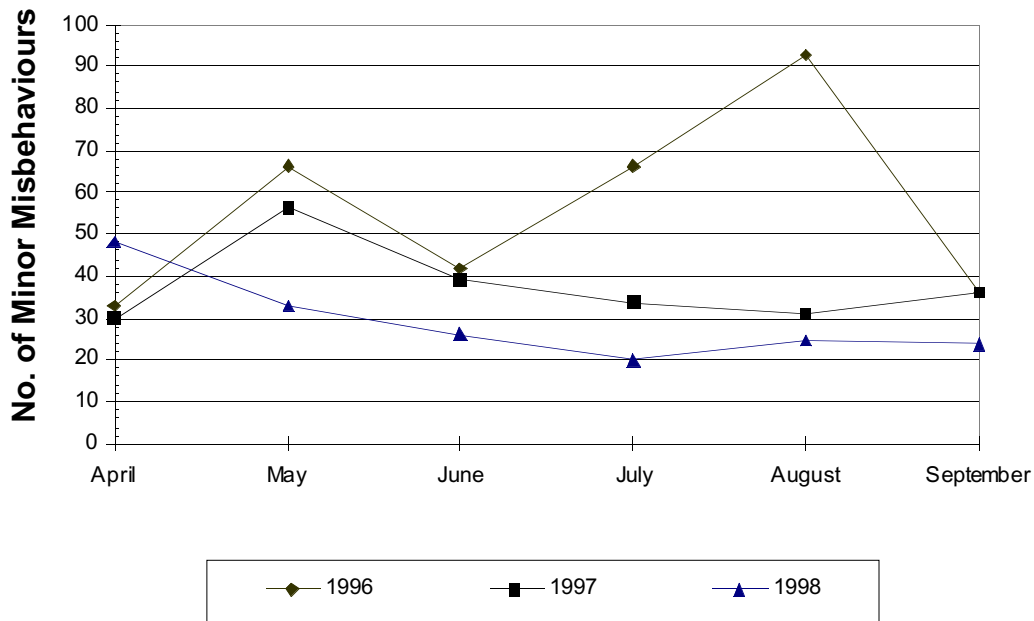
Tables 3 and 4 indicate that thirty two and one half percent (32.5%) more students qualified for the school “buy up” scheme suggesting that the individual student was more receptive to what was happening in the classroom and was interested in the learning process.

Minor misbehaviours during non-school hours

As a result of the positive indications from Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4, the Department of Juvenile Justice was requested to collate statistics for minor misbehaviours during the same periods. These statistics were used to ascertain whether there had been any changes in behavioural patterns while students were not at school throughout this trial period.

Graph 1 shows the minor misbehaviours within the Juvenile Justice Centre after school and on weekends/holidays.

MINOR MISBEHAVIOURS



Graph 1. minor misbehaviours within the Juvenile Justice Centre after school and on weekends/holidays.

Summary

The 1998 graph line is significantly lower than the previous two years (with the exception of April). This would suggest that the Detention Centre during this “snapshot” time frame was a lot more settled in the non-school time periods than would otherwise be the case. The overall conclusion that the School Evaluation Committee made from the above data was that:

“There appeared to be significant improvement in the “culture” of the Centre while VET programs were in place with the reduced incidents indicating more settled behaviour”.

CONCLUSION

The overall conclusion of this evaluation study was that the 'Best Practice Demonstration Project: Provision of Vocational Education and Training to Aboriginal Students on Remand and Committal in a NSW Juvenile Justice Facility' achieved its stated objectives. The degree to which it achieved its stated outcomes could not be determined due to the short term nature of this evaluation. In order to adequately measure the achievement of the outcomes medium and long term follow-up studies would need to be implemented.

However, from the evaluation study it can be stated that:

- There appeared to be a significant improvement in the "culture" of the Centre while VET programs were in place with the reduced incidents indicating more settled behaviour.
- Student/staff surveys indicated that VET programs were a worthwhile complement to normal school programs as they taught valuable vocational skills that were transportable.
- VET programs attracted accreditation that could be used as a basis for further education or obtaining employment.
- Many of the vocational skills learnt by students were beneficial to isolated communities in remote NSW.
- Self esteem of students and confidence in their ability to succeed was a major positive outcome for the individual student.
- School and Centre staff morale was positive as many people felt that VET was achieving measurable outcomes and that the Centre was a much better place to work. Staff also felt that they would rather work with incarcerated students in a Centre which offered VET.
- VET curricula should be continued and if possible expanded to offer a wider range of programs particularly for the long term students.

Shepherds Park School and Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture, through its Aboriginal Rural Training Program, have formed a strong and committed partnership to improving the long-term outcomes and quality of life for Indigenous and non-Indigenous juvenile offenders. Funding for 2000 has already been secured to pilot post release employment and training programs. Funding is still being sought to continue vocational education and training programs for 2000.

REFERENCES

ATSIPTAC 1998, *Working together to break the cycle - Position Paper*, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Training Advisory Council, Melbourne.

Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture 1999, *Evaluation Report on Best Practice Demonstration Project - Provision of Vocational Education and Training to Aboriginal Students on Remand and Committal in a NSW Juvenile Justice Facility - May 1999*, NSW Agriculture, Yanco.