

# The Swan Nyungar Sports Education Program



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## Best practice strategies in building respectful relationships between staff and students

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# Introduction

# Swan Nyungar Sports Education Program



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SNSEP is a TSF demonstration project commenced in 2002 to supplement school capacity to meet the special learning needs of Nyungar high school students in WA

- Significant challenges raised in 2003 evaluation
- 2004 evaluation identified respect, adolescent identity, Nyungar identity, behaviour, attendance, retention, improved employment, tertiary education and training outcomes as needing further investigation.



# Required adjustments identified in 2003 evaluation

# Mid-way through first year (2002)

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## Greater ownership needed by Balga SH re:

- Administrative flexibility in:
  - needing to collapse the timetable
  - having a fully dedicated project manager
  - regulatory responsibilities and agreement on acceptable adjustments
  - cultural differences in setting priorities and approaches to time
- Pedagogy (teaching methods)
- Curriculum design / integration
- Engagement of families and elders
- Interaction between SNSEP and non-SNSEP staff.

# Staff interviews assess progress mid-way through second year (2003)

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## Pedagogy (Teaching Methods)

- In SNSEP
  - more group work with real world tasks across disciplines
  - goal setting linked with Nyungar culture in real life contexts
  - sport applied more broadly to develop skills and aspirations in class room settings
- In Balga
  - general timetable still fairly rigid
  - student focus and emphasis on employability across programs.

# Staff interviews assess progress mid-way through second year (2003)

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## Curriculum Design / Integration

- **In SNSEP**
  - curriculum developments ongoing, sometimes day to day
  - broader recognition of Nyungar culture in all 8 learning areas
  - gender based cultural issues introduced for girls' cohort
  - specialist taken on to develop Nyungar component of curriculum
- **In Balga**
  - continuing tensions between curricular development and quality control
  - some learning coordinators unaware of SNSEP curriculum.

# Staff interviews assess progress mid-way through second year (2003)

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## Engagement of families and elders

- In SNSEP
  - marked increase in attendance at sporting events
  - continuing challenges to involve families in learning areas, the parent liaison group, and elders in decision making more broadly
- In Balga
  - principal brings different sections of the community together to enhance family/community involvement for whole school
  - SNSEP had not been in existence long enough to impact Balga's engagement of families more broadly at this point in time.

# Staff interviews assess progress mid-way through second year (2003)

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## Interaction between SNSEP and other program staff

- **SNSEP Staff**
  - some feel alienated from the rest of the school
  - slowly recognising the need to communicate more with other staff
  - recruitment of 8 more SNSEP staff to handle increasing work load
- **Staff in Other Balga Programs**
  - more positive attitudes and interest in SNSEP than in first year
  - some feel threatened by implications of SNSEP for their personal/professional development.

# Staff interviews assess progress mid-way through second year (2003)

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## Administrative Flexibility

- **In SNSEP**
  - biggest admin challenge is applying selection criteria consistently
  - greater support from senior administrators during second year
  - greater flexibility than the rest of the school
- **In Balga**
  - growing realisation that flexibility enhances student outcomes
  - more limits on admin flexibility in public than in private system
  - resistance to administrative flexibility is largely political.

# Priorities to Enhance the Social Inclusion of SNSEP Students and Staff

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## Recommendations

- A more inclusive and consistent process for cross program communication and management
  - better internal communication needed across programs to break down stereotypes and strengthen positive attitudes
- Developing a greater appreciation of shared goals among all sub schools and that most challenges are broadly educational and similar
- Engaging families and communities more broadly
- Retaining dedicated project manager.



# Ethnographic research – Best practice strategies: 2004

## ***Acknowledgement by staff of students' language, history and cultural markers -- best practice strategies\****

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- Staff consistently giving active demonstrations of respect for cultural differences
  - Changing conventions for sitting in a classroom
- Explicit negotiation of mutually acceptable 'house rules'
  - For example, in return for consideration of students' cultural needs and ways, students remove hats before a lesson begins and avoid the use of swear words
- Balancing warmth and support with calls to personal responsibility and challenges to perform
  - For example, successful teachers appreciated that Indigenous students were not accustomed to sitting for long periods of silence in class and required a more interactive context in which to tackle work.

# *Promotion of positive Nyungar identity -- best practice principles\**

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- Include an Indigenous language and culture curriculum taught by a trained Indigenous staff person
  - the girls' and boys' language and culture teachers look for ways for students to share Nyungar language and culture with family, friends and others outside of school
- Value and accept the importance of Aboriginal English in establishing positive Nyungar identities
  - teachers recognised that constant correction of Aboriginal English could be interpreted by the students as racism and non-acceptance
- Facilitate involvement of parents and Nyungar elders in the educational process
  - by engaging families at home in language and culture issues addressed in classes.

# *Application of team spirit lessons learned on the sports field to classroom settings -- best practice principles\**

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- Students encouraged to work individually and in teams by problem solving together and sharing knowledge
  - informal peer support and collaborative learning reduced the 'shame' involved in not knowing answers in class
- Staff monitors behaviour daily of at-risk students for whom the team approach was not sufficient motivation
  - IEPs (Individual Education Plans) for students with behaviour difficulties who do not understand the content of lessons
  - BMPs (Behaviour Management Plans) for students with persistent behaviour difficulties
- Peer support and role modelling from older SNSEP students
  - the importance of peer role modelling prompted a significant change in the original timetable for 'mainstreaming'.

## ***Increased levels of student choice and responsibility -- best practice principles\****

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*Learning -- curriculum and pedagogy are continually developed and adjusted to improve students' engagement and to increase basic literacy and numeracy levels*

- Curriculum with connections to sports, culture and life
- Flexible delivery of curriculum to allow students to contribute to the shape of their learning experience
  - eg team work, highly structured tasks, providing choice
  - students were not good at attending to tasks that required longer periods of time for completion
  - lessons parcelled into smaller structured and achievable tasks that require a basic research process -- look for, extract, and record information
- Learning contracts between students and teachers
- IEPs\*\* for at-risk students.

## ***Increased levels of student choice and responsibility -- best practice principles\****

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*Learning -- curriculum and pedagogy are continually developed and adjusted to improve students' engagement and to increase basic literacy and numeracy levels (cont.)*

- Addition of complementary programs to ensure successful school to work transitions
- Best practice principles recommended that SNSEP provide access to:
  - 'Aspirations' bridging course to Edith Cowan University
  - Post-compulsory Vocational Education and Training courses
  - 'Balga Works' program with direct links to employment opportunities.

## ***Increased levels of student choice and responsibility -- best practice principles\****

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*Positive Adolescent Identity -- enhances responsible choices and effective planning for life beyond compulsory schooling*

- SNSEP enables students to formulate moral systems, negotiate peer/family relationships, develop skills for adult independence, achieve realistic, stable, positive self-identities by:
  - valuing and nurturing students' positive conceptions of self
  - avoiding situations that could bring 'shame' on individual students
  - stress management training to deal with inner conflict and conflict resolution.
  - Mentors and teachers collaborate in fostering students' positive self-concepts
  - Rewards program to encourage achievement and good behaviour.

# Engagement of parents -- best practice principles\*



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- SNSEP staff promote the value of schooling with parents and students to encourage attendance and retention by
  - Finding ways to make the school environment a more welcoming place for Nyungar students
  - Tracking attendance and retention
  - Providing transport to and from school with an indigenous bus manager to facilitate the service\*\*
  - A reward structure to value attendance by merit and remove rewards if attendance falls.
- The Program has made extensive changes to make the school environment less alienating
  - a collapsed timetable
  - a focus on sports and Indigenous language and culture
  - a relevant curriculum delivered flexibly.
- Levels of parental involvement continue to be low.



## Going forward with the best practice strategies

# Refining best practice strategies – finding the right balance

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- The best practice strategies have consolidated learning about cultural and historical sensitivity in relation to the participation of Indigenous students in education
- We now need to develop the practical skill to apply the strategies to the best possible effect by re-assessing:
  - The current balance between educational and pastoral responses
  - The present balance between moving forward as a group (group cohesion) with the individual learning needs and capacities of those within the group
  - The balance between support and challenge by simultaneously engaging more of the families in the program.

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