



Professional Learning
Research
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Learning in Practice

Volume 1 Number 1 November 2017



About the Barker Institute:

- Provides a centre for research, reflective practice, professional learning and innovation in education
- Is a resource hub that facilitates the ongoing development of learning for teachers, allowing them to stay abreast of emerging practice, constantly striving to refine the quality of teaching and learning
- Looks to develop collaborative ventures with other institutions and providers, initiating research and innovation combined with the implementation of new projects and programs for the benefit of students, staff and the broader community
- Shares current research and issues with parents, professional bodies and educators around the globe through ongoing symposia, forums, lectures and conferences

About the Learning in Practice Journal:

As a leader in Christian education, Barker College aims to both demonstrate and inform best practice. This journal was developed to showcase a range of initiatives and research projects from across the School. It explains the rationale behind innovations in practice and archives pivotal developments in Barker's academic, co-curricular and pastoral realms.

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Darkinjung Barker: A year in review



Learning in Practice
2017 Vol. 1 (1)
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Abstract

This article provides a summary of life at Barker's Aboriginal compass. It details the highlights and hurdles of its inaugural year, telling an inspirational story of growth, perseverance and hope.

The first year of Darkinjung Barker has shown me a true understanding of the needs of our Indigenous students. The documentation is right, the media reports are right, we need to be able to do more Australia wide to close the gap in Indigenous education. Prior to starting on this project I was, to be honest, a little naive and I have been possibly sheltered from the true needs of these people. We are only looking at a small snapshot of the Indigenous community, but we have uncovered a true reflection of what has been reported on for so long.

We have a range of families who are quite well adjusted to the daily running routines of a school environment. They will offer assistance, have the children well groomed and well fed. On the other end of the scale we have some families that have for generations never trusted or had a good experience with the education system. Their children suffer from a lack of a positive outlook on school from home. The parents and grandparents are distrusting of the 'white man', but in the last year, I have seen a change, a positive change. I have been let into their world and I have been told things that up until now have been withheld. This is a great sign.

We have children that are high needs. We are working on a daily support structure that helps them with their academic but also behavioural needs. It isn't easy as the range of these needs can fluctuate daily. The academic needs of the children are far beyond anything that we could have imagined. Our initial testing uncovered some alarming results that have the majority of children working at least twelve months behind their chronological age, some as far back as four years behind. We have a large challenge ahead of us, but with the right resourcing, teaching and learning spaces and staff, we will be able to turn this around. We are only a year into this magnificent project and we can already see positive results. There are many questions that are starting to arise in regards to 2017 and beyond. As the year progresses, I think that we will need to address these and have a positive and informative plan that will be well in place prior to the commencement of the 2017 academic year.

We have had a great year up here at Yarramalong. It has been a full of excitement and new expectations. With NAPLAN now complete for another 12 months, the children can now relax into a normal school routine. It is a stressful time for the little ones. We worked hard with the staff from Bunnings. We approached Bunnings and asked if it would be possible to donate a vegetable garden for our children. They were very generous and have now donated two! NITV came for a visit. They have been very interested in our school and they

have wanted to do a story for some time. They spent the day with us, interviewing staff and students. Wednesdays take us down to Hornsby for our fortnightly visit. The children enjoy a range of activities, working with Year 11 and 12, from library and art to the magical world of Science, Health, swimming and agriculture. Our school is surrounded by a mixture of old and new. We have the traditional school house and cottage, but nestled in between is the Nyang Shack, a new multipurpose room that will predominantly house our younger children for the morning session. This room is also a kitchen and meeting place. We look out across our field to see a variety of bird life and an abundance of gum trees that we can sit in the shade and learn. The outside environment becomes our classroom. We are able to use a multitude of spaces to educate the children. We are not limited by the one area. The recess and lunch periods returned sound to the dormant school grounds. Not a day goes past that we don't have a visitor just pop in to say hello. We have former students, staff, locals and inquisitive, friendly members of the community, all excited that our new school has returned a sense of joy to the valley. Our partnership with the Yarralong Community Centre has been very important. As we are limited on space, the kindness shown by the YCC Executive has been very helpful. We have made some significant developments academically with the children. K-6 uses the Jolly Phonics' Programme. It is a multi-sensory program that teaches children literacy through synthetic phonics. With the significant developmental challenges that we have it is already producing great results.

Sharyn Bailey commenced in late May (2016) as an additional Teacher Assistant/ Teacher's Aide. Sharyn is highly experienced and she has been a wonderful asset to our staff. She will also be quite influential and a positive role model in the development of Chernita West. Our administration is now in full swing with Mrs Amy Shackleton joining the ranks. This role is developing to be an important part of our small community at Yarralong. I am finding that with an administration assistant, the parents and community are making a strong connection with her. In our short time at Yarralong, it has become apparent that this role is a need and so the connection between Barker, Darkinjung, parents and community is developing really well. During the year we have had some important events that should be mentioned. We had excursions to the Maliga Art Show. This is an art show that highlights the artistic brilliance of the local Indigenous school children. We have been invited to submit works to this show in 2017. We also have had a visit from Mrs Karen McNamara, our local Member for Dobell. She spent a few hours with the children. Mr and Mrs Gamson made a visit on behalf of the OBA. The children and staff were delighted with time they gave to us and the gift of OBA hats that they received. NITV and ABC Lateline turned our children into stars! It was a busy time but some great positives came out of the stories. The BCPA and Darkinjung parents enjoyed a lovely morning tea event. This was a wonderful experience for both parties. I know how valuable that connection will be.

Registration was a huge event. Mrs Jane Williams from BOSTES made a visit. She was truly impressed at the work both academically, but also how we have developed a school in such a short amount of time. It has been a massive team effort from all staff and for that I'm truly grateful. 2016 brought with it some new challenges; possibly the primary one is space. Both rooms are at capacity with the vast array of teaching resources that it takes for a classroom to function, add to that the children and staff and it is getting quite crowded. I have seen the children's attitude to school change. It is now a place that they know well, are comfortable in and respect the teachers and environment. We have commenced testing for this term to track the children's development from February to August. This data will then allow me to put into place a whole school plan for the upcoming year. NAIDOC week is an

important time in the Indigenous calendar. We enjoyed a wonderful celebration of NAIDOC. It was such an amazing experience for everyone that was involved. NAIDOC is the coming together for awareness of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait People. In Monday the final week of Term 2, we had the Year 3 and 4 boys travel from Hornsby to Yarramalong. This was the first time that we have had a class from Barker travel up to our campus. There have been conversations where our children will go after they leave Darkinjung Barker. Two of our students will head into Year 6 next year (with the possibility of another one starting), It is a very exciting time for the families.

We have nearly travelled once around the sun since commencing at Yarramalong. This time last year I could not have imagined that we would be standing here reminiscing on such a successful first year of Darkinjung Barker. The anticipation and anxieties of starting a new school seem like it was such a long time ago. We are a school, a functioning school working on the beginning steps of supporting our beautiful children as they embark on their education journey. I would like to encourage you to visit our beautiful part of the world. To the many staff and visitors that we have had in 2016, I'd like to say thank you for your contribution to the lives of our children. I want to thank you for allowing me to take our school into the Indigenous community. It is very rewarding, not only for the students but to me also. The growth in these young, proud Aboriginal children is amazing.



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